

UNMIL FOCUS



Vol. 2, No. 03

March - May 2006

A photograph of three young girls walking on a dirt path. The girl on the left is wearing a floral dress and is looking down. The girl in the middle is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and is smiling. The girl on the right is wearing a red dress and is holding a yellow fruit to her face. They are all wearing sandals.

UN Envoy Pleads for Liberia Building Life Anew Home, At Last...

From the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



Four months into the term of the new Government of Liberia, we can see the country positioning itself for the next phase in its recovery while at the same time discovering the full extent of its decline.

The Government's First 150 Days Action Plan, launched in mid April, marked the first steps in what we all know will be a long process. Those first steps, however, illustrate the President's priorities and the importance she attaches to making a difference on the ground for the people of Liberia.

Among the initiatives, we see projects to rehabilitate the roads and bridges; the restoration of schools and health clinics; the construction of water pipelines and wells; and the return of courts and the justice system. Alongside these measures are the larger scale infrastructure projects to provide electricity and water as well as the reforms to tackle corruption and to ensure sound revenue collection and disbursement for the benefit of the country's citizens. Finally, the Action Plan includes programmes vital to Liberia's peace and security such as the restructuring of the Liberia National Police and Armed Forces and the return of refugees to their communities.

It is an ambitious plan made more so as the new Government grapples with debts and arrears accrued during previous regimes. The statistics are revealing and alarming: Liberia is staggering under an external debt of \$3.7 billion and a domestic debt of US\$754 million, per capita GDP is estimated to have declined 90 per cent from US\$1,269 in 1980 to US\$163 in 2005, and the unemployment rate stands at over 80 per cent.

While these numbers are certainly sobering, we can be encouraged by the present goodwill of the international community. Several high-level delegations from donor countries have visited the country in

recent months, and in a number of cases this has translated into action and funding. UNMIL and the UN Country Team are working with these donors to put that funding to work in concrete projects which will generate employment and rehabilitate roads, schools and hospitals.

In tandem with its 150 Days Action Plan, the Government is developing an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I/PRSP) in consultation with numerous stakeholders, including international partners and civil society. The I/PRSP will set out the national development vision for Liberia for the next three to five years.

To help take recovery and development down to local communities across the nation, UN Country Support Teams are being launched in all of Liberia's fifteen counties. The Teams will provide support to the Government in formulating county development strategies.

As we enter the rainy season, numerous projects are being launched across the country to keep the roads open and improve people's lives, while at the same time the long-term development strategy is being prepared. The United Nations is making important contributions to all of the above programmes. In the 150 Days Action Plan, both UNMIL and the UN Country Team have committed in one way or another to achieve a number of the deliverables. The United Nations will be involved as a long-term partner in the I/PRSP. The United Nations will play the lead role, through the County Support Teams, in assisting the Government institutions at the county level as they begin to take responsibility for security, reconstruction and development. Lastly, though most importantly, UNMIL will continue to ensure the security of the country so that the Government and the people of Liberia can move forward with the rebuilding of their lives and communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan Doss".

Alan Doss
Special Representative of the
Secretary-General and Coordinator of
United Nations Operations in Liberia



In her maiden address to the UN Security Council, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf reiterated her determination to foster peace and development in war-ravaged Liberia and urged the international community

to continue to stay engaged with the country to consolidate the gains achieved during the last two years.



Taking advantage of vocational training and other reintegration programmes, more and more disarmed

ex-combatants are rebuilding their lives with renewed self-confidence.



With all the 314, 000 registered IDPs in Liberia having received assistance to return home, all of the

country's 35 IDP camps have now been closed.



In late April, UNMIL kicked off a nationwide recruitment campaign for new trainees for the Liberian National Police.

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Published by the Public Information
Office, United Nations Mission in
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Printed by Buck Press Ltd., Accra, Ghana

UN Envoy Pleads for Liberia

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

The head of the UN Mission in Liberia, Alan Doss, cautioned the international community against a “precipitous draw down” of the peacekeeping forces in the country and appealed for a “massive effort” to ensure tangible progress in post-war Liberia, while addressing the UN Security Council in late March.

“The next two years will be critical for Liberia,” Doss said, referring to the need for consolidating the peace in the country following the installation of a democratically elected government. He was briefing the Security Council on Secretary-General

was also crucial for stability.

“I have personally visited all 15 counties of Liberia and witnessed at first hand the human and physical consequences of economic and social collapse,” Doss said. “A massive effort will therefore be required to ensure that there is some tangible progress in the months ahead,” he noted.

“The whole country is currently running on an annual budget of US\$84 million while its external debt stands at over US\$3 billion,” the UN envoy said. He appealed for early action on the sorely-needed debt relief and urged donors to quickly bridge the gap in emergency funding.

In his latest report on Liberia, which deals specifically with recommendations for the drawdown of UNMIL, the Secretary-General says that despite “considerable overall improvement” in security, a number of tasks critical to the sustainability of peace and stability remained to be accomplished.

In his report, Annan recommended a reduction of 250 troops but an increase in the strength of the police by one formed police unit to “help enhance police primacy.” He said such an addition would not only ensure that UNMIL retains sufficient capacity to provide “a reliable security umbrella for the new government to fully establish its authority” but would also give the Liberian Police more time to gain experience it needs to eventually take over from UNMIL.

The priority tasks identified by UNMIL during a two-year consolidation phase include assisting the new government in completing the reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for ex-combatants and facilitating the completion of the return and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons. Accelerating the training and institutional development of the Liberian National Police and assisting the restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia are also among top priorities, in addition to helping the new government restore the culture of respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The Liberian people and the donor community were unanimous in requesting that the engineering assets of UNMIL be used to accelerate road rehabilitation in the countryside, with donors providing the necessary material and human resources, the report said. The World Bank and the European Commission have agreed to allocate funds for that purpose on a pilot basis, Annan informed the Security Council.

The Secretary-General paid tribute to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, noting that, among other things, she had appointed an inclusive government, taken “bold initiatives” to remove corruption, embraced the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme, and



Kofi Annan

UN Photo/Evan Schneider

adopted a reconstruction and development agenda. He urged the IMF and the World Bank to assist the new government to find ways to overcome the substantial debt burden inherited from previous administrations.

Annan said international partners should be ready to extend timely and necessary support to Liberia to tackle the great challenges that lay ahead but stressed that the country's government must “actively take ownership” of its development agenda.

“In the coming months the government will need to forge an enhanced partnership with the United Nations family, the donor community, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, for the consolidation of peace and for taking forward the reconstruction and development agenda of Liberia,” Annan concluded. ♦



Alan Doss

Kofi Annan's latest report on UNMIL's activities.

“Experience has taught us that an incomplete effort in consolidating the peace is often a prelude to renewed conflict,” he said, stressing the importance of the international community's continued engagement to nurture the country's fragile peace.

The UN envoy reiterated that the continued presence of UNMIL is crucial to help maintain security in the fragile country until the national security structure is complete, to help extend State authority to the countryside, to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants and displaced persons, and to assist reconciliation efforts. Many of these tasks not only boost political progress but also affect the economic viability of the country, which he noted

Stay Engaged, President Johnson-Sirleaf Urges the UN

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

In the first ever address to the UN Security Council by a female head of state from the African continent, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on 17 March recalled Liberia's painful past that had touched virtually every family and every individual but reiterated her determination to foster peace and development in the country.

Presenting the case for Liberia to the international community, Johnson-Sirleaf urged that the United Nations stay engaged with Liberia to complete the work of the peacekeepers who she said had made great sacrifices to help the country emerge from chaos.

"We must consolidate the gains achieved during the transition of the last two years so that the enormous investment made by the international community in the peace and stability of Liberia and the region is not put at risk," Johnson-Sirleaf told the 15-member Security Council.

"Liberia is still a fragile State," Africa's first elected female head of state cautioned, urging the international community to maintain its support for the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the country. Liberia's armed forces were being reconstituted and the restructuring of the national police was not yet complete, she said, stressing the need for continued external help to sustain peace and security and in maintaining law and order.

With the assistance of the United Nations and other partners, Liberia was determined to complete the reintegration of its refugees and internally displaced

persons and ex-combatants while simultaneously addressing the most basic needs of its people, Johnson-Sirleaf noted. She sought urgent contributions from donor nations and organizations to speed up the country's recovery and development as well as relief from the huge foreign debt Liberia had accumulated over the past several decades.

Renewing her commitment to upholding transparency and accountability in her government, Johnson-Sirleaf said Liberia was committed to continued collaboration with its international partners in implementing the Governance and Economic

government to enhance national revenue flows so that Liberia could depend more on its own resources for national reconstruction and development.

Liberia has established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to confront the legacy of the past so that the nation could go forward in the future, Johnson-Sirleaf said. She reminded Council members that it was imperative to provide tangible assurances to the people of Liberia that democracy would bring change for the better. "They must see early improvements in health and education, as well as economic opportunity, starting with jobs," she said.

Deeply appreciating the role played by the UN in restoring peace to Liberia, Johnson-Sirleaf said the activities of the UN had endeared the world body to Liberians. She expressed deep appreciation for the support for Liberia from the international community, including

the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union and the European Commission, as well as traditional friends such as the United States and the countries providing troops and police to UN's peacekeeping mission in Liberia.

The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, pledged his country's support to Liberia's reconstruction. He applauded the commitment of Liberia's new president to create a better future for her country that had inspired the members of the U.S. Congress to give her a standing ovation when she addressed them a few days earlier. ♦



Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP). She highlighted the need for capacity-building to enhance Liberian ownership of GEMAP, and to help transfer critical skills to Liberians to strengthen national capacity on a long-term basis.

President Johnson-Sirleaf highlighted the efforts her government was making to meet the requirements for the lifting of timber and diamond sanctions imposed on Liberia by the Security Council. As most of the requirements for implementing the Kimberly Process were being met by the government, she hoped for an early lifting of the ban on diamond export. She also spoke about other measures taken by the

Building Life Anew

By Yuko Maeda

Behind a long narrow strip of petty traders in one of the busiest local markets in the capital city of Monrovia stands a bamboo-thatched hut. Five sewing machines on the dry mud floor fill the tiny room of about 10 square meters, with posters of fashion models pinned on the walls and a stock of colourful fabrics piled up on a bench.

says, referring to a person who looked after the needs of fighters from preparing meals to doing laundry to serving as a sex object. “I was with them for seven years...”

Her ordeal ended when Taylor was elected President in 1997. She managed to leave the forces and started a petty trade in Monrovia, the only thing she knew in her previous life to make a living. She had stopped schooling at the third grade.

Now she has skills and a job to sustain

In the reintegration process, more than 65,000 out of 101,000 demobilised ex-combatants have benefited from various opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge aimed at rebuilding their lives. The beneficiaries include former porters, caretakers and sex slaves.

“I don’t want to go back to Zorzor,” says Beatrice Johnson (not the real name), a 34-year-old seamstress. “Because I suffered too much there, no, I can’t go back to my hometown.” Zorzor, 300 km north of Monrovia, is the second largest city in Liberia’s northernmost county of Lofa, once the country’s breadbasket.

Johnson was just 19 when a group of rebels supporting Charles Taylor attacked her village in the middle of the night one day in 1991. Many fled to the nearby bush, narrowly escaping death, while others were tortured and mercilessly killed. The rebels abducted Johnson at gunpoint, raped her and forced her to serve for them as a sex slave. “I was a caretaker,” she

her family. Johnson and three of her female classmates from a vocational training course joined the AB Tailor Shop last September. She says all of them have their own clients who like dresses they make. With a dream to run their own shop one day, they come to work from morning to evening, six days a week. “My dream? I want to be a ‘boss’ woman!” Johnson chuckles, with her hands and feet busy operating the sewing machine she received a year ago when she graduated from the Community Empowerment Programme, a local NGO that offers skills training.

CEP is one of 550 implementing partners for the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration scheme,

Yuko Maeda





NEW LIFE
Skills training offers new opportunities
for ex-combatants

a major component of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra that led to the end of Liberia's brutal civil war. In the disarmament process that completed in late 2004, the UN Mission in Liberia and its partners demobilised more than 101,000 former fighters, including more than 22,000 women and nearly 11,000 children, and collected 28,000 weapons and 33,000 munitions. Those demobilised are not only fighters but also porters, cooks, caretakers and sex slaves who belonged to the warring factions.

Jeanette Kamara (not the real name), 25, is among them. "I never held a gun," says Kamara, another seamstress at the AB Tailor. Because her boyfriend was a soldier, she accompanied him to cook meals and wash clothes, she says. "Life was tough. We moved from bush to bush, fighting, for years."

Based on lessons from previous peace-keeping missions, UN Security Council mandated UNMIL to rehabilitate the demobilised soldiers and help them reintegrate into mainstream society. UNMIL formed a DDRR team with the UN agencies, international donors and national counterparts. While UNMIL peacekeepers took the lead to disarm and demobilise ex-combatants, the UN Development Programme has guided the rehabilitation and reintegration process, managing and administering the UNDP DDRR Trust Fund.

In the RR component of DDRR, the demobilised combatants receive an opportunity to resume formal education, learn agriculture or other vocational skills, enter apprenticeship or take short-term public work. All those projects are funded by the DDRR Trust Fund and RR partners such as UNICEF, USAID and the European Commission. The Trust Fund has projected a revised budget of US\$71.3 million to complete the job, targeting 99,000 ex-combatants, excluding those who can self-reintegrate, at an average cost of US\$800 per person for RR. Donors have pledged all the projected budget and so far disbursed US\$53.3 million.

Since June 2004 when a DDRR execution agency, dubbed the Joint Implementation Unit, kicked off the first reintegration project, more than 65,000 demobilised ex-combatants have benefited

from various opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge aimed at rebuilding their lives. The most popular RR programme is formal education with more than 32,000 ex-combatants enrolled in schools, followed by agriculture and vocational skills training, attracting 24,000 beneficiaries.

“Through the efforts of DDRR, I’ve changed. The process has made me useful for the society,” says Takpor Gweh, 53-year-old former “commander” who graduated from CEP’s eight-month tailoring course last year. He gave up his gun after the peace deal was signed. For him, the fighting was an only means of survival. “It was fighting against fighting,” he says. “Doing this business is much better than fighting the war. Never, ever, I’ll fight a war again!”

Gweh’s determination sounds firm. When he threw his gun away, he made up his mind that he would bring a better life for his children, he says. “I paid attention to all the instructions at the school.” He graduated as an honour student and now runs his own tailoring shop and traditional Nimba food catering services with help from his two wives. On a good day his business brings LD\$800 altogether, about US\$15, enough to sustain his family and send his nine kids to school. “I’m happy

now,” he smiles.

Lucy Page, executive Director of CEP which was established in 2000, has witnessed positive changes in many graduates who went through skills training in various trades. It initially offered training in soap-making, pastry and tailoring to returning female refugees and internally displaced

A few months training or a few years schooling alone might not be enough for all demobilised people to get back on their feet. However, the reintegration process certainly gives an opportunity for those demoralised people to build confidence in themselves.

people and now targets ex-combatants, mainly women and girls. “Many graduates have reintegrated in the community very well,” she says. “The community appreciates what we do, for instance, commenting about a graduate that ‘she was a troublemaker in the past but now she’s a role model.’ It’s an inspiration for us, too.”

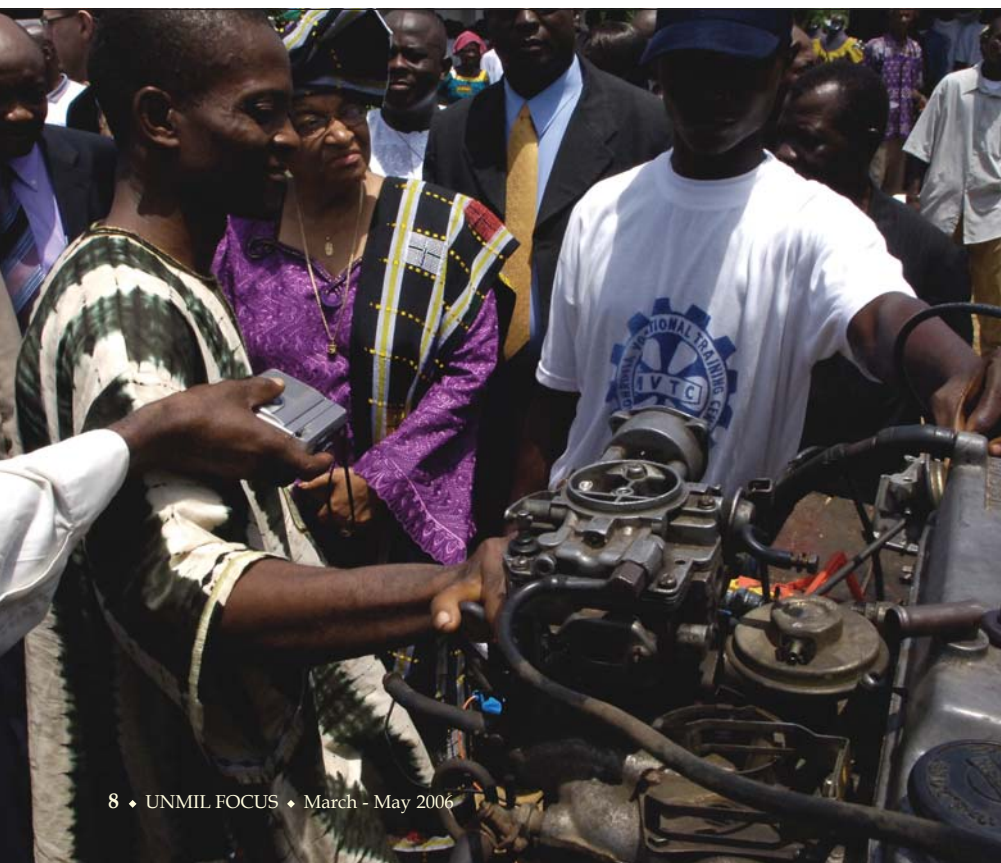
That’s what the RR scheme is all about, says Charles Achodo, UNDP’s DDR Policy Advisor. The RR projects give ex-combatants skills and knowledge to start their lives anew, which become “assets” for them to gain a membership to the community, he explains. “The community would accept ex-combatants because of changes in their attitudes, behaviours and mind-sets. Through the RR projects, we are providing something they can demonstrate how changed they are.”

The RR programme is scheduled to end in June 2007. With funding secured, other remaining 34,000 ex-combatants are expected to have access to various reintegration projects by then.

“We will bring all ex-combatants under this programme to give them skills and knowledge to start over. But that’s not the end of the reintegration process,” says Andrea Tamagnini, Director of UNMIL Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery, the mission’s RR wing. He says the RR designers and policy makers are now shifting its focus from vocational training to employment to let demobilised ex-combatants lead to a normal life mingling with other civilians. “Reintegration is a process, in which people abandon arms, receive training, get employed and reconcile with people in the community... Although the (RR) programme will be over next year, we will continue our support to the government’s efforts to enhance employment and reconciliation.”

A few months training or a few years schooling alone might not be enough for all demobilised people to get back on their feet when the country has no running water or electricity, lacks basic social services and offers only a little employment opportunities. However, the reintegration process certainly gives an opportunity for those demoralised people to build confidence in themselves.

Look at Joe Lewis, 36-year-old CEP graduate who, not long ago, was a specialist in handling AK-47 and other machine guns. He now owns his tailoring shop to support his family and aspires to attend a night school to finish his secondary education. “People call me ‘Mr. Tailor’ and ask me to make something for them. I feel fine,” he beams. ♦



Set to Join National Reconstruction

By Yuko Maeda

Equipped with new skills in various trades they chose, nearly 750 ex-combatants and war-affected youth in early May vowed to join the national reconstruction efforts in the presence of their President as they graduated from a vocational training school on the outskirts of capital Monrovia.

"Through the training we got, we promise we'll help rebuild Liberia," said Jeremiah Bohlen, a representative of the graduates, in his valedictory statement during the graduation ceremony at the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre (MVTC), one of the oldest publicly owned vocational schools. He thanked the government for giving priority to the rehabilitation of youth when it faces enormous tasks of nation building. "It's a privilege. We appreciate the training opportunity we received at this institution."

Among 747 graduates are 541 ex-combatants, the second group of trainees benefiting from the Rehabilitation and Reintegration scheme for demobilised combatants designed to help them rejoin mainstream society. The Joint Implementation Unit, a country team of Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration consisting of the UN Mission in Liberia, the UN Development Programme and national counterparts, has designed and administered numerous reintegration projects in agriculture, vocational training and formal education through its 550 implementing partners. MVTC is one of the largest institutions to offer skills training.

In the last eight months, the MVTC apprentices went through an intensive skills training course in at least one of the 12 trades offered, including plumbing, masonry, carpentry, welding, auto mechanics and electrical work. It was a big leap forward for those who knew nothing



President Johnson-Sirleaf congratulates the graduates

but fighting to learn professional skills that would help sustain themselves and rebuild the war-torn country.

"I see myself very fine," said Harriet Gray, 23-year-old plumbing graduate, after the graduation ceremony. She was once a fierce female combatant and served as a caretaker for rebels. But now that she has gained skills in plumbing, she is keen to utilize them to lead a new life. "I didn't have any skills or any knowledge before this training as I got involved in violence deeply... Now I want to go back to the community to work as a plumber to prove what I can do to the society. We, the youth, have to rebuild the country. I don't want to be left out."

Responding to the enthusiasm the graduates expressed, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a very special guest at the ceremony to honour their achievements, applauded the graduates. "I commend every one of you for your hard work, commitment, discipline and dedication to improve yourself and contribute to the reconstruction of this country," she told the cheering crowd. Admitting the acute lack of job opportunities in the country, she pledged commitment of her government and its international and national development partners to create more employment opportunities. "The biggest

challenge we face... is how we, the government and its partners, can give you a job," she told the graduates. "We'll do what we can to identify jobs... It would take some time, but we want to make sure that you can do what you want with your skills."

Jordan Ryan, Coordinator of the UN Humanitarian Country Team and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, encouraged the enthusiastic graduates. "Liberia is changing. The future of Liberia is here in each one of you," he told the gathering. "Every one of your skills are needed here, there, everywhere throughout the country. It's time for you to go back to the community to use your skills, knowledge and experience... On your shoulder is a burden of rebuilding Liberia!"

The graduates seemed ready to take up that burden. Yusif Kanu, 27-year-old graduate who mastered skills in electrical work, said he was ready to do his part to rebuild the country. "I picked electrical work because I thought the development of electricity would be the first development agenda. I wanted to be part of the national reconstruction," he said of his chosen profession. "Today, I'm graduating from the school. I want to go out there and use whatever I learned here." ♦

More Disarmed Ex-soldiers Ready for Productive Life

By Yuko Maeda

With additional funds coming in and a joint effort to disarm and reintegrate fighters back into society gaining momentum, more and more former ex-combatants are getting ready to resume life anew with newly acquired knowledge and skills.

In late February, the first group of demobilised children in Grand Bassa

ing 28 girls, he graduated from the vocational training course at the Don Bosco Homes, a local NGO and an implementing partner to the UN Children's Fund which helps reintegrate over 10,000 war-affected children across the country. It offers the demobilised children option to choose either free primary education or skills training as part of the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration process.

At Don Bosco Homes, the graduating trainees mastered skills in agriculture,

including women and children and collected 28,000 weapons and 33,000 heavy munitions. Since June 2004, when the DDRR team kicked off the first reintegration project, it has offered more than 65,000 demobilised ex-combatants an opportunity to gain vocational skills and formal education. Other 34,000 ex-combatants are expected to enter the Rehabilitation and Reintegration programmes by the end of the DDRR scheme scheduled to end in June 2007.

According to the UN Development Programme Trust Fund, a financial channel for the DDRR programmes, donors have pledged all the projected budget of US\$71.3 million to cover the necessary costs with US\$53.3 million provided so far.

In Tubmanburg, 30 fresh blacksmiths are now working on the mass production of farming and fishery tools to be used for skills training courses sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organisation as part of the DDRR process.

The novice blacksmiths, mostly ex-combatants, are themselves beneficiaries of one of the four FAO-run blacksmith training schools across Liberia. Before graduating the course in late February, the new blacksmiths in Tubmanburg had been trained for three months to turn scrap metal into farming tools such as hoes, rakes and cutlasses as well as poultry feeders and buckets. Supporting a smooth take-off, FAO has made contracts with them to produce about 3,000 hoes and feeders for the next round of training.

Thomas Smile, one of the novice blacksmiths, said the skills they received through training were invaluable. "We have received something more important than silver or gold—an education," he said at the graduation ceremony.

To date, 250 ex-combatants have received training in blacksmithing at FAO-sponsored schools. ♦



Special Representative Alan Doss looks on as newly trained blacksmiths demonstrate their skills.

County graduated from a nine-month skills training programme tailored to help them lead a productive life.

"I thank God and all of my trainers for helping me to learn my trade," exclaimed Sylvester, a 17-year-old former child-soldier who completed the training in masonry. Sylvester was a typical ex-child soldier who was abducted by one of the rebel groups to fight for them but later fought against them during 14 years of the back-to-back civil war.

Along with other 115 trainees includ-

mechanics, carpentry, cosmetology, tailoring and baking, among others.

William is one of those who learned skills in masonry. Not long ago he was a commander and artillery specialist, but now he says he is a different human being. "I don't want to fight again. I want to be peaceful and my trade to be part of me as I grow up."

During the disarmament period from late 2003 through late 2004, the UN Mission in Liberia and its partners demobilised more than 101,000 former fighters



The Road to Recovery

By Sulaiman Momodu

It's a hot and sticky day in the first week of May in Voinjama, a town once dubbed as "the most dangerous place in the world" during Liberia's 14-year civil war. Sweating profusely in the aggressive sun, a dozen Pakistani peacekeepers shuttle freshly-cut logs of wood to a spot where the tyres of a vehicle have been buried in the mud. They are demonstrating UNMIL's road rehabilitation efforts as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss, flanked by senior colleagues, looks on.

Doss and his team are on a routine trip to the countryside to assess the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in the country as the United Nations gradually shifts its focus from peacekeeping to reconstruction and economic recovery. "I see lots of progress, and above all, I see a lot of people have come back to Lofa, to Voinjama. Now we must move in the spirit of reconciliation and rebuild this country which has suffered so much during the years of war," Doss reminds the small gathering.

The second largest and most devastated of Liberia's 15 counties, Lofa county reflects the challenges this war-ravaged nation faces on the road to its recovery. Top on the list of pressing challenges is the need to improve Liberia's roads, made worse by years of neglect during the prolonged civil war, leaving many parts of the country inaccessible.

Since deployment in 2003, UNMIL's military engineers, mainly from Bangladesh, China and Pakistan, in collaboration with the Mission's Civil Engineering Section, have been engaged in emergency repair of major road networks in many parts of the country. While the civil engineers lead the assessment, planning of projects and provide technical advice and materials, their military counterparts provide equipment and implement the project.

So far, over 2,000 km of roads, including 800 km of primary roads classified as Main Supply Routes, as well as numerous bridges (wooden and bailey) and airport runways have been repaired by the peacekeepers. The primary roads connect Monrovia with regional capitals.

Major paved roads repaired include Monrovia-Tubmanburg (70 km), Gbarnga-Kakata (128 km) and Monrovia-Roberts International Airport (69 km). Unpaved roads rehabilitated include Zwedru-Greenville (180 km), Fish Town-Harper (135 km) and Firestone Junction-Buchanan (91 km). In addition, 50 log bridges were repaired along those roads. Nine bailey bridges, each of which costs an average of US\$70,000, were also constructed. The longest, a 250-foot bridge on the outskirts of Monrovia, was constructed by the Irish Quick Reaction Force engineers.


Rehabilitation of roads, which was stepped up before the 2005 national elections, has helped economic activities pick

up in the country in addition to improving access for humanitarian interventions. Repatriation of thousands of refugees have also been made smoother, thanks to the repair works undertaken on roads connecting border towns with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, in collaboration with other UN agencies and international NGOs.

Doss and his team travelled some distance on the 65km long Voinjama-Kolahun-Foya road currently being rehabilitated by UNHCR in collaboration with GTZ, a German NGO, at an estimated cost of US\$300,000 of which the UNDP paid US\$96,000. Once completed, the road will enable the repatriation of Liberian refugees from neighbouring Guinea and Sierra Leone even at the height of the rainy season. Last year, UNHCR was forced to suspend repatriation of refugees from Sierra Leone when the roads became impassable.

"We are very grateful to UNMIL and other organizations for repairing our roads," Vannie Kromah, a resident of Lofa, remarked. "The road is very important to us because without passable roads, we become cut off and isolated."

However, with a lot more rehabilitation work left to be completed and funding shortages looming large, there is a long way to go before Liberia's dilapidated road network could come back to full life and meaningfully contribute to its economic recovery. ♦



DESERTED

With the residents gone home, the IDP camps look forlorn

Home, At Last...

By Sulaiman Momodu

Barkolleh Sumo, 18, stood by the truck as it was being loaded with his family's meagre possessions, intensely gazing at the sprawling Salala internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Bong County. Salala, Liberia's largest IDP camp of makeshift mud and wattle houses roofed with plastic sheets, was witnessing two important events on Friday, 3 March, so the camp had assumed a festive look.

While some IDPs were busy singing, dancing and showing appreciation to a visiting United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) team for the restoration of peace to their war-ravaged country, others who had just received their assistance package including food, non-food items and transportation allowance were busy loading their belongings into a waiting truck for the journey back home after several months or years away. "We are happy to be going back," said Sumo, a ninth grade student, expressing hope of continuing his education in his home county of Lofa.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance, Jordan Ryan, together with a team from UNMIL's Humanitarian

Coordination Section, was visiting IDP camps to ascertain the status of return before the rainy season. Ryan had assured the IDPs that the Liberian government, the UN family and other humanitarian actors would assist them to achieve their expressed desire of finally going back home before the rains come.

About one and half months after his visit, Ryan was in Salala camp again on Thursday, 20 April. He was not alone. This time, Liberia's Vice President Hon. Joseph Boakai, ministers, representatives from various UN agencies, such as the World Food Programme and the International Organisation for Migration, and international and national NGOs, all travelled to Salala, about 200 km northeast of the capital, Monrovia.

The once sprawling and noisy camp was now a shadow of its former self. Most of the displaced population had gone back home leaving behind a vast stretch of land dotted by demolished houses or 'bafas' as locally known. The impressive gathering at Salala was therefore a symbolic one to mark the end of the IDP return process.

Hundreds of thousands of Liberians, uprooted from their homes as a result of the civil war, had ended up in IDP camps throughout the country. They all had only one hope, that one day they will be able to

go back home.

Following the deployment of UN peacekeepers and the restoration of peace, the IDP return process began on 8 November 2004. Sixteen months later, the joint efforts of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), UN agencies, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the American refugee Committee and national NGOs had enabled a total of 314, 095 registered displaced persons living in Liberia's 35 IDP camps and spontaneous settlements to return home. Today, all those camps are officially closed with the vast majority of IDPs returning to Lofa, Bong, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties.

Vice President Boakai told the last group of returnees to "restart their lives, tell the story, build new homes and bring up their children." He cautioned that the goodwill of the donor community would not last forever and that Liberians must regain self-respect, build their homes and farm lands, and provide education and services for themselves. "Liberia will never go to war again," he said, urging Liberians to resist and report corrupt practices.

A visibly delighted Ryan recalled that even prior to her inauguration on 16 January, President Johnson-Sirleaf had

expressed concern for the well-being of the thousands of people who were still living in camps around the country. He said the President, along with the UN and humanitarian partners, wanted to ensure that every possible effort was made to help families get back home before the rainy season sets in. "Today, we come to Salala and proudly celebrate that every Liberian IDP has now been provided with assistance enabling them to return home."

Ryan recognised the dedication of NGOs, donors and the UN for what he described as "working tirelessly" with Liberian partners to keep the process moving. He pointed out that caring for people in camps and helping them to return home was only a part of the resettlement process. "It is now time for all of us to make a far greater effort to ensure that the hundreds of thousands who have returned home find ways to sustain themselves. Now is the time for the world to come to aid a massive campaign to rebuild Liberia," he said.

"We in the UN pledge our support to Liberia and its people to do all we could to support this national reconstruction," Ryan said. He appealed to international partners to work hard to support community-based recovery programmes, provide medical assistance and agricultural implements, and ensure that educational facilities are functional. The UNHCR Country Representative, Mengesha Kebede, noted that since the launch of the return programme, UNHCR had contributed over US\$24 million to meet the government's efforts to promote IDP protection and provide direct assistance in the form of non-food items and transport grants.

Back home, many returnees are delighted to see rebuilding efforts are in progress. The UN Development Programme, UNMIL, UNHCR, the Food and Agricultural Organization and UNICEF, together with international and national NGOs, are undertaking efforts to ensure that the returns are sustainable and the returnees' protection concerns are addressed. The European Commission, the United States, Norway and Japan are among key donors providing major financial support for these efforts. ♦

"Go and See" Visit For Refugees



Michael Broza

By Siebo Williams

With the return of peace and the election of a democratic government, Liberian refugees living in neighbouring countries are being encouraged to return home and contribute to the nation's reconstruction and development. To support this effort, the offices of UNHCR in Liberia and Ghana late April organized a "Go and See" visit of a delegation of Liberian refugees living in Ghana to afford them an opportunity to witness first-hand the situation on the ground and report back to their compatriots still at the Buduburam Refugee Camp.

The exercise was part of the strategy to promote the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees. The delegation's activities and interactions were filmed to ensure the refugee community accepts their reports as credible as well as to capture key areas of concern to make objective, well informed decisions regarding repatriation.

While in Liberia the five-member delegation toured several counties, including Bomi and Grand Cape Mount. In these counties, the delegation held discussions with local government authorities, UN Agencies, UNMIL and NGOs involved in returnee and reintegration activities. The team also went on several field visits to reintegration centers, schools, health centers/clinics, market places, refugee transit centers and also met with customs and border security authorities.

At the end of the visit, the delegation agreed that security conditions were ade-

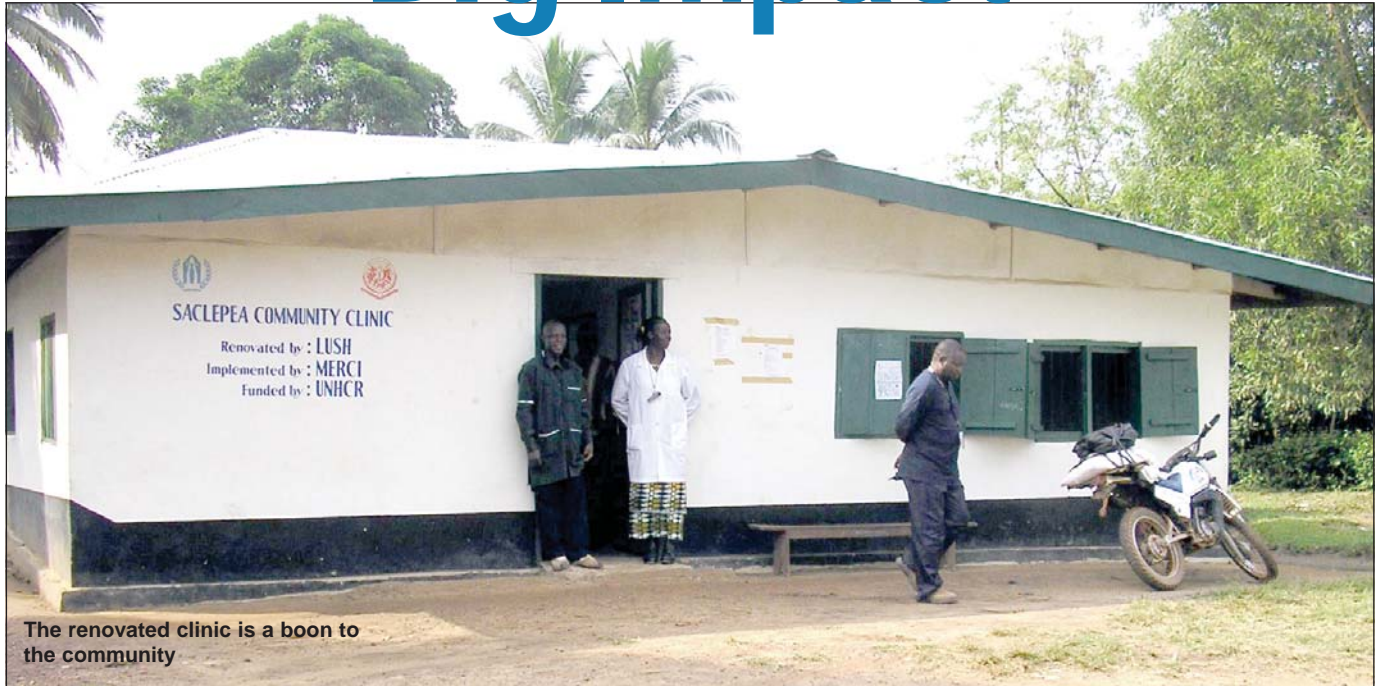
quate for the return of refugees not only from Ghana, but also other countries. "We have seen and understood the guns are not bombarding people anymore. We have realized there are difficult socio-economic conditions which of course pertain in other countries and not just Liberia alone. I think one can be very determined, strong and brave to come and join the reconstruction of Liberia," said the head of the delegation, Varney D. Sambolai, chairman of the Refugee Welfare Council at Buduburam.

Moses K. Bah, another member of the delegation, said his prime focus was education, the level of work being done in this area that will encourage the refugees to return. "I want to see whether the children at Buduburam when they come back will be admitted in schools in their various counties. Of course, the main concern is security. The conditions are ripe to return home."

UNHCR Ghana Assistant Public Information Officer Needa Jehu-Hoyah said the trip afforded the refugees the opportunity to see what pertains in Liberia. "We chose the representatives very carefully. The five people represented the Muslim Council, Ministerial Council, the Youth, Welfare Council, Women Interest Groups and Council of Elders. The main idea is for the refugees themselves to come and see the situation on the ground and be able to report back to Buduburam."

The refugee delegation's visit is expected to lay the ground work for the voluntary return of more than 39,000 Liberian refugees in Ghana. ♦

Small Drops, Big Impact



The renovated clinic is a boon to the community

By Annette Rehr

Sitting patiently in the reception hall of Saclepea clinic, calming the crying baby on her lap, Grace Wolo, who returned to Liberia in 2005 from Nicla refugee camp near Guiglo in Côte d'Ivoire, has the relieved air of a young mother who finally will get some urgently needed help. She does not know why her little girl kept on crying over the past few days, but she will soon find out.

Next to her sits an elderly man in his early 70s. His eyes are yellowish and red. Every now and then he takes out a small towel from his pocket to wipe the sweat off his face. "I'm here for malaria treatment," he says weakly. "I come to the clinic every day."

The clinic in downtown Saclepea was reconstructed by UNHCR in 2004 and is run by the agency's implementing partner

MERCI. Looted and destroyed during the war, it now hosts a laboratory, a dispensary, consulting rooms, a delivery room where mothers and their new born babies can stay for several hours after having

The professional nurse attends to an average of 60 to 70 patients a day. With her calming smile, dedication and gentle approach to the ill, all their fears, writ large on their faces, seem to vanish.

given birth, and a room with two beds for patients who need to be supervised. Being a UNHCR community-based recovery project, rebuilt upon request by the community of Saclepea, it is one of those proj-

ects that obviously make a big difference in the life of the local population. "Before the war, Saclepea district had three clinics," recalls Mary K. Lankah, in charge of the clinic. "After the war, we had nothing left. This clinic is a very good start for Saclepea," she says. "It inspires confidence in people that things are gradually getting better."

The professional nurse attends to an average of 60 to 70 patients a day. With her calming smile, dedication and gentle approach to the ill, all their fears, writ large on their faces, seem to vanish. Like Lankah, 11 other staff at the clinic are busy easing the pain of their patients. Up to 15 towns and villages with a population of over 38,300 people benefit from Saclepea clinic. Being one of UNHCR's main areas of return for former Liberian refugees, the agency wanted to make sure that basic health services are available to returnees and the local communities.

"Most of our patients seek treatment

for malaria, diarrhea, respiratory infections or sexually transmitted infections,” Lankah says. However, if patients need a doctor or surgery, they have to be transferred to Ganta, Phebe (Bong) or Monrovia. “We have no doctors in Nimba,” she complains. “They are all in Monrovia or still out of the country.” In the meantime, the nursing staff takes care of most of the daily cases. “I’ve seen a lot during the war. I stayed here and worked as a nurse in the bush. We have come a long way,” she says, heading towards the next patient with a reassuring smile.

Meanwhile, Wolo is on her way out of the clinic. Her baby has an intestine infection. She got some drugs from the dispensary and was advised by MERCI staff on daily hygiene and how to get safe drinking water to avoid further ailments.

“There is no point in reconstructing clinics if we don’t engage in water and sanitation projects first,” UNHCR Representative Mengesha Kebede says, highlighting the agency’s guidelines on standards and indicators for field operations. Addressing the root causes of ailments in towns and villages, with help from the leadership of the communities, is one of the basic reintegration approaches the refugee agency has adopted in its work.

Moses Zdeaye, Paramount Chief of Janzon Town, Grand Gedeh, for example, has insisted on getting two more water points for his community from UNHCR before engaging in some other urgently needed project. “Many of our children died of diarrhea last year,” he recalls. “We need clean water and education workshops on hygiene, then we can solve this problem.” Today, over 3,000 people live in Janzon Town. At the beginning of the civil war, most of them had fled to Côte d’Ivoire but came back in 1998 to rebuild their village. The community also hosts a couple of Ivorian refugee families who are well integrated and participate in the town’s farming activities. In addition to the water point, UNHCR also built a clinic outside of Janzon Town, one of nine health projects implemented by its partner MERLIN in Grand Gedeh.

Since most of the returning Liberians - both IDPs and refugees -- are in desperate need of housing, UNHCR further runs

shelter projects, mainly in Lofa County, to assist the needy with shelter kits. Recently, a total of 275 families living in 34 villages in Lofa’s Foya District have been registered to receive roofing kits, provided by UNHCR’s implementing partner Peace

Even though Liberia’s needs are enormous and the international community’s efforts to help rebuild the country may sometimes seem like a drop in the ocean, the impact of every single project on the ground is overwhelming.

Winds Japan (PWJ).

So far, UNHCR has reconstructed close to 250 schools and 52 clinics and health centres in major areas of return. In 2006 more projects are to follow, to continue empowering communities to be self-reliant and help people find sustainable solutions for a better future.

Even though Liberia’s needs are enormous and the international community’s efforts to help rebuild the country may sometimes seem like a drop in the ocean, the impact of every single project on the ground is overwhelming. As Paramount Chief Zdeaye, heading a small delegation of visitors from Monrovia, proudly walks towards the water point he finally got, residents of Janzon Town join the group. Having clean and safe drinking water in the middle of the bush is still like a miracle for them.

In order to keep the water point intact, Zdeaye has imposed a strict surveillance over the hand pump to make sure that playing children won’t spoil it. “When we came back, we rebuilt our huts ourselves,” he explains. “Then we went back to our fields and started farming again. But for this kind of projects, water points, clinics or schools, we need your help. We can’t do it alone, we depend on the assistance from the world,” he says in a spontaneous, moving speech. “And my chiefdom is very grateful for your assistance.” •

The writer is a Public Information Officer, UNHCR Liberia.



Annette Rehr

Let's Educate Girls!



Robert Grossman/UNICEF

By Patrick Slavin

It was a proud day for Hawa Kamara and all other school-age girls who have dreamed of attending classes just like boys. Kamara, a 10-year-old third grader at JWA Pearson Kindergarten and Elementary School in Monrovia, heard her country's President vow to send them all to school, saying the whole nation cares about them.

"Education of the girl is a national concern and an imperative... I make a national call to all Liberians to see a new country with a shared vision for girls' education... We'll make a major contribution to free ourselves from poverty, discrimination, violence and disease," said President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as she launched a new National Policy on Girls' Education on 18 April in front of dozens of school-girls and representatives from various agencies at the balloon-festooned Monrovia City Hall.

Kamara, who introduced the President to the audience, was pleased to listen to every single word Africa's first female elected head of state had to say. She is her

role model who continued studying at Harvard while raising children and working as a waitress and eventually reached the pinnacle of her country's leadership after working successfully at the World Bank and the UN.

Johnson-Sirleaf, an inspiration for women around the world, pledged her government's commitment to provide free and compulsory education for every single girl and boy and make the country free from illiteracy and underdevelopment. "I find the compelling need to situate the empowerment of women and girls education and training as the corner stone of our government's development strategy... This National Policy will become a turning point for the girl child education and country," she declared.

The new national policy is the first of its kind in Liberia's history, calling for a collective effort to reach "universal primary education" for every Liberian child. It serves as a guideline for the country to ensure none of the school-age girls is left out from the national development agenda.

In Liberia, which only recently emerged from the chaotic civil conflict,

girls account for only 40.8 per cent of all the students enrolled in primary school, according to the Liberian Millennium Development Goals Report by the Ministry of Education. The gender gap in education widens as they grow: at secondary and university levels, just about three in 10 students are girls. Almost one out of two children in West and Central Africa is out of school and most of these are girls in rural areas. More than 80 per cent of those children out of school have mothers with no formal education.

The policy, a culmination of more than two years work by the Education Ministry and its international partners led by the UN agency for children, UNICEF, sets a number of targets to change all of this. In order to achieve primary education for all by 2015 as stated in the Millennium Development Goals, a universal declaration for world development, the policy suggests providing free and compulsory primary education, reducing secondary school fees by 50 per cent, and offering counselling and small-scale scholarships for girls. It also stipulates to set up measures such as recruiting more female teach-

UNICEF Provides Office Equipment to Education Ministry

In order to strengthen the work of the Ministry of Education throughout the country, the UN Children's Fund donated in late March key office equipment to the ministry's headquarters and seven county offices.

The equipment donated included four 10-KVA generators, five photocopiers and basic office supplies. All the supplies are "starter kits" for the ministry to set up and run the country's education services. Due to a legacy of the civil conflict, almost all the public offices are poorly

equipped to provide public services.

"UNICEF is reaffirming to the Government of Liberia its commitment to helping it rebuild the country's educational sector," said Keith J. Wright of UNICEF Liberia. "Building the capacity of County Education Offices will assist in furthering the important work of supervision and monitoring of schools."

The UN agency supports the re-establishment of basic social services in its seven focus counties of Bomi, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Maryland,

Montserrado and Nimba. The supplies are to be delivered to those county offices.

James Emmanuel Roberts, Deputy Education Minister for Planning and Research, appreciated the donation as he received the items.

"The time is now for our partners and donors to help the Ministry of Education get its vitally important work up and running," he said. "These UNICEF supplies are extremely useful in the rebuilding of our educational system."

ers, taking legal and disciplinary actions against teachers who commit sexual abuse, and opening new parent-teacher associations and girls clubs.

"Education of the girl child in Liberia is critical and an urgent matter. It is actually about human rights and human dignity. It is about peace and the development of the country," said Alan Doss, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and the Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, at the launching ceremony. He pointed out that educating girls can yield social and economic benefits for the current generation and those to come, saying an educated girl will become more productive at home and work, and assume a more active role in social, economic and political decision-making throughout her life.

"Quality basic education for the girl child is the essential prerequisite for the

conquest of poverty, which has become the overarching goal of the United Nations and the international community in the new century," Doss added.

Developing the new policy stems from the 2002 Education Law of Liberia that requires the Education Ministry design special programmes and policies to ensure gender equity at all levels of school. A technical team, consisting of representatives from the ministry, UNICEF, UNMIL and other UN agencies, the Forum for African Women Educationalists and Oxfam, conducted assessments on the situation in the education sector and studied the needs to formulate the policy. Based on the policy, the ministry is now preparing detailed action plans to achieve the envisaged goals.

"We continue to face a situation in which girls remain at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to enjoying their right

to quality basic education," said Angela Kearney, outgoing Country Representative of UNICEF Liberia, referring to the fact that girls are often left out of school due to poverty and traditional customs. "This new policy is the first important step to eliminate an imbalance between girls and boys and having all children in school. This can only be good for Liberia."

After the ceremony, Kamara joined a photo opportunity with Johnson-Sirleaf, whom she admires for her hard work and achievements. Kamara now clearly understands she too has a right to education and better opportunities. When asked what she wants to be when she grows up, she paused for a moment before spelling out her dream. "I want to be a nurse." ♦

The writer is an Information/Communications Officer, UNICEF Liberia.



UNFORGETTABLE MOMENT
Elated school children pose for the camera with their President

In the searing sun, an elite group of newly trained police officers in dark blue uniforms marched into the ground, swinging arms and legs in unison, as top officials of the Liberian National Police and the UN Mission in Liberia looked on.

“PSU is ready for the exercise!” a commander of the Police Support Unit, an elite anti-riot squad, reported to LNP Director Beatrice Sieh, the first female chief of police in Liberia’s history. Standing firm in front of the cadets, she returned the salute with a quick nod.

The members of the PSU, who went through a 10-month comprehensive training at the Police Academy run by the UN Police and a special intensive training in Nigeria last year, demonstrated an advance drill in which the men and women lined up in square formation and thumped the ground as music played by a police marching band rent the air. A UN helicopter circled around in the sky dropping flyers



Police Recruitment

announcing the kick-off of a new recruitment drive for the LNP.

On 21 April, the LNP along with UNMIL re-launched a campaign across Liberia to recruit nearly 1,400 personnel to reach its full strength of 3,500 police personnel. PSU’s exercise was part of the kick-off ceremony to showcase a new face of the orderly national law enforcement force, which was until recently perceived as an organisation notorious for torture, brutality and illegal arrests.

“It is time for a police force that is staffed by the best of the best,” exhorted UN Police Commissioner Mohammed Alhassan at the ceremony held in the ground of the LNP Headquarters in Monrovia. “It is crucial to give Liberia the police that it deserves: that is a national police known for proper conduct; that protects the rights of citizens and democratic life; that is transparent and accountable to the law; and that maintains a safe and secure environment for all.”

The reform and restructuring of the

police and other law enforcement agencies is a cooperative effort to follow through on the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed in August 2003, which brought Liberia’s 14-year bloodshed to an end. In May 2004, UNMIL and the Transitional Government jointly kicked off the first recruitment

In the renewed campaign, a few LNP recruitment mobile teams go around town to town and door to door to attract eligible men and women to join the force.

campaign to create a new 3,500-strong police force, and a few months later, reopened the police academy in Paynesville, Monrovia, to train new recruits and qualified former police officers to become credible professionals. So

far, 1,633 officers, both veteran and new, underwent training and are now deployed to serve in various parts of the country. The second recruitment drive is to meet the target within a year to complete the restructuring.

Luiz Carlos da Costa, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Operations and Rule of Law, acknowledges the progress Liberia has made. “We have come a long way to get to this point of recreating a law enforcement body that is accountable to the people,” he told those gathered at the ceremony. “Sustainable peace must be founded on the bedrock of a genuinely democratic law enforcement agency. This is our common goal and jointly we must strive to achieve it.”

In the renewed campaign, a few LNP recruitment mobile teams go around town to town and door to door to attract eligible men and women to join the force. Thousands of flyers on the drive have been printed for distribution and information



Luiz Carlos da Costa with LNP Director Beatrice Sieh at the re-launch of the police recruitment drive

Drive Re-Launch

campaigns are going on across the country.

For the newly trained police officers, the government offers more attractive salary and incentives than in the past. New officers now get paid US\$90 per month, qualify for various training programmes abroad and even have a chance to join a UN peacekeeping mission in another country. In addition, the LNP and UNMIL are now negotiating with the University of Liberia so that training at the Police Academy will be counted as academic credits.

With the new incentives, Director Sieh called on youth to make history by coming forward to serve their country through the police force.

"The Police have remained unattractive to the public due to two factors: low salary and incentives and negative perceptions of the police as a result of its role in the civil war -- the history of our crisis," she conceded in her speech at the campaign kick-off, referring to an previous

average monthly salary of less than US\$20, which cannot even buy a bag of rice, and the past record of police's gross human rights abuses. However, now that the country has regained its peace and democracy, it is time for every man and woman to join nation-building. "Both you and I are responsible for the reconstruction of our country... Fellow Liberians, now is the time for us to make history!"

The recruitment drive particularly targets female candidates as the restructured LNP strives for a better gender balance under the new government of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first female head of state in Africa. The President has appointed a number of females in key positions, including Ministers of Finance, Justice and Commerce. The new LNP Director is one of her appointees.

"Discouragingly, among the 1,633 already in the new police force, only 87 of them are women," said Benetta Tarr, Deputy Minister of Gender and Development, at the ceremony. Her min-

istry and the UNMIL Office of Gender Advisor have been giving inputs to the recruitment campaigners to win at least 20 per cent representation of women in the force.

"We want as many women as possible," Director Sieh beseeched, encouraging young women to follow her footsteps. "Let our sisters come forward and compete in the force."

Responding to the call, dozens of citizens flocked to the recruitment booth set up at the venue of the ceremony.

Muhammed Bomupoja, a 20-year-old high school graduate and part-time worker in the computer-related field, explained how he sees a career opportunity ahead of him with the police. "It's a better paid job, and we can get overseas training and even a scholarship. I see a whole lot of opportunities in the police force," he smiled, tightly clutching a registration form. He dreams one day he will climb up the career path and handle international crimes with the Interpol! ♦

UNMIL Has Scored Significant Successes...

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General **Jordan Ryan**, in charge of Recovery and Governance, is also the Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia. In an interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, he discusses UNMIL's efforts in the areas of recovery and rehabilitation in the country, the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme and other issues.

What, in UNMIL's view, are the priority areas of recovery in Liberia?

Liberia is a country with many priorities. The challenges are daunting as the infrastructure is largely destroyed and the human capital eroded due to the years of conflict. Liberia has a long way to go to reach the Millennium Development Goals. Poverty reduction, health, education, water and sanitation, electricity and unemployment are all urgent needs that have to be addressed. And these need to be done consistently with the effort to grow the economy in a manner free of corruption and in a way that addressed the fundamental inequalities that still exist.

In what ways are we, the United Nations Mission in Liberia, assisting the new Government in fulfilling its recovery agenda?

Being an integrated mission, we are making a concerted effort together with the rest of the UN family, the Funds and Programmes and specialized agencies such as the World Bank. We are working with our partners to restore state authority, to tackle priority humanitarian challenges that still exist following the 14-year war, and to begin a process of planning the country's longer-term development.

President Johnson-Sirleaf has been very clear about the direction Liberia needs to take, and the United Nations works very much in consonance with this

nationally-driven development agenda. This must be a nationally led process, and we are helping the Government to develop the necessary capacity to make this happen. We are focused in these early days on developing Liberia's own national capacity to take charge of its development, whether in encouraging overseas Liberians to return home to foster the volunteer spirit among Liberian youth.

We also bring the United Nations values to these efforts, such as freedom, equality, tolerance and solidarity, which are fundamental to the Millennium Declaration signed by all Heads of State in September 2000. Many of these may have

been forgotten in a society torn apart by 14 years of conflict, but I hope that we can help bring the nation together once again by supporting mechanisms such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The United Nations has a special role to foster greater respect for human rights, including equality of women.

What is the mechanism of liaison that exists between UNMIL and the new Government in order to carry forward this recovery agenda?

The President chairs the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC) which she established, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is a standing member. The LRDC oversees the work of four clusters chaired by Government ministers. They include security, economic revitalization, rule of law and governance, and basic infrastructure and social services. Both UNMIL and the UN Country Team are part of the recovery and development dialogue with the Government through these four clusters.

Beyond this high level engagement,



we are currently in the process of launching County Support Teams (CSTs), to bring together the various UN actors working at the county level to address recovery priorities. The CSTs will assist the newly appointed Superintendents on issues ranging from security and governance to the reintegration of ex-combatants and community-based recovery, at the same time building capacity of local government increasingly to assume responsibility for these activities.

Does the LRDC replace the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF)?

The RFTF came to an end in March and the President announced the establishment of the LRDC as an overarching aid coordination mechanism.

Besides the functions described earlier, the LRDC is also monitoring the implementation of the 150-day action plan. This plan outlines a number of quick-win deliverables to which the Government and the international community have committed themselves. The LRDC will also drive forward Liberia's new development agenda, part of which will be set forth in the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy.

How can UNMIL assist the new Government to ensure a new culture of governance takes root in the country?

Through our Human Rights and Protection Section, we have highlighted the importance of a culture of governance that respects human rights. To help promote the Rule of Law, our Legal and Judicial Services Support Division is working with the judiciary to resuscitate the justice system by training lawyers and judges as well as by developing the court infrastructure.

Colleagues in UNMIL and UNDP have been engaged with the Governance Reform Commission, which is looking at some fundamental governance issues such as the constitution, corruption and separation of powers in relation to the executive, legislature and the judiciary. There is an ongoing rich dialogue, and the United Nations has been able to bring in a number of experts to assist the Government, share best practices and case studies from abroad and work shoulder to shoulder with

Liberian people as they rebuild civil authority across the nation.

The Governance and Reform Commission (GRC) has already complained about its lack of sufficient resources...

The Head of the Reform Commission, Mr. Amos Sawyer, is one of the most distinguished citizens of this country. A former President, he is adept at both theory and practice of government and has written extensively about the need for creating a democratic society that engages all of Liberia's people. He is facing the same kind of resource issues as many other institutions in this country. The hope is that international donors and the UN Country Team will consider this an opportunity to build the capacity of the GRC and many other key institutions in this country.

What progress has been made so far in implementing the GEMAP?

The new Government has embraced GEMAP and recognized its importance as a tool for ensuring that Liberia's resources are managed effectively. The international community is committed to building the capacity of the Government to better regulate its financial flows and stock of natural resources.

GEMAP is a process. While it will not bring change overnight, some international advisors are already on board and have begun their work. The Government has taken a number of rigorous steps such as reviewing contracts and concessions, instituting strict cash management procedures and strengthening the Finance Ministry. Already, an increase in national revenue intake has been registered. The Government's commitment to use the GEMAP to Liberia's benefit is a very good sign indeed.

Ultimately, Liberia's recovery depends upon its ability to develop a robust economy that encourages private investment. But the economy needs also to advance the needs of the poor and ensure that the benefits of development are shared in a more equitable manner. This country has all the prerequisites for successful development, if it is capable of managing its resources for the benefit of its people – especially the poor. A transparent economy without

corruption will also attract more foreign investment, which will spur more growth and put the country on the road to achieving the MDGs.

Liberia has huge foreign debt accumulated under the previous governments and everyone knows that this country cannot afford to repay such a large sum. Shouldn't the international financial institutions write off this debt with the return of peace and democracy?

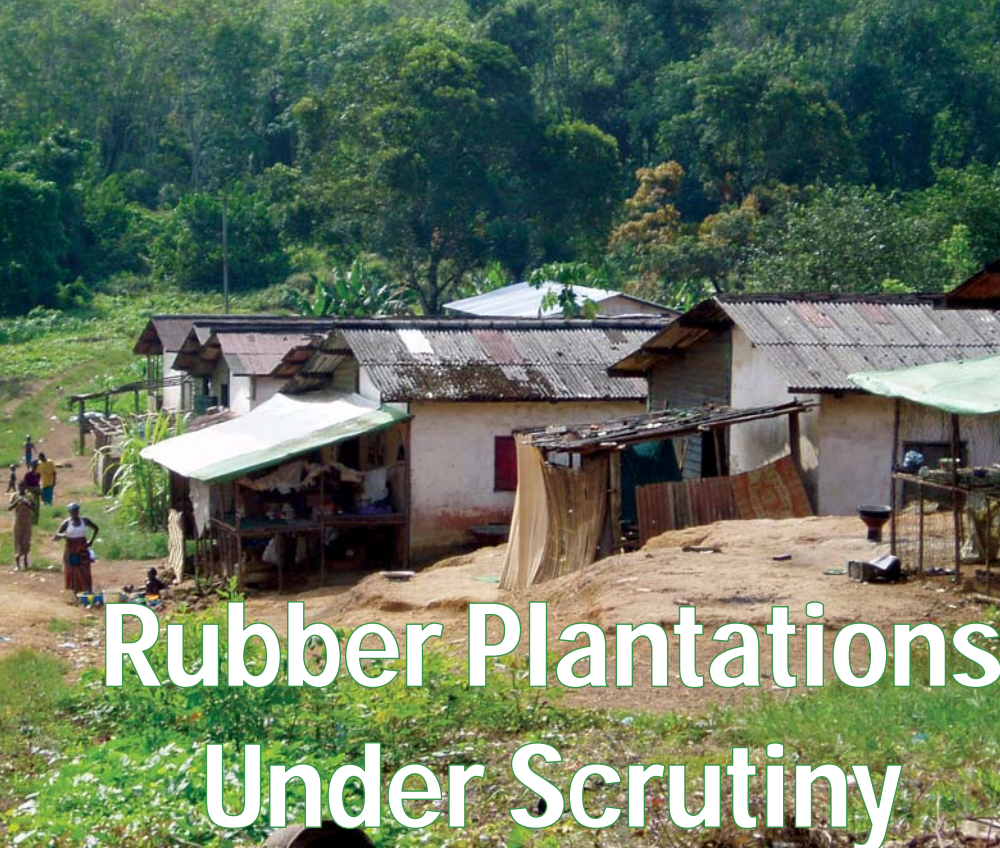
We hope that the World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Bank will move quickly to conclude talks with Liberia on how to handle this massive debt. With the commitment and seriousness of purpose that we have seen so far from the President, the Minister of Finance and other members of the cabinet, I hope that the international financial institutions will find a way to respond to the needs of Liberia faster than would normally be the case. Liberia is facing enormous development challenges, such as extreme poverty and an almost non-existent health sector. It simply cannot bear the enormous debt burden acquired over the past several decades.

How would you describe your experience in Liberia since your arrival?

I am very glad to be a part of the United Nations in Liberia. The UN receives a lot of criticism from some quarters, but here we have already scored some significant successes. The UN Mission has secured the peace, helped with the conduct of a fair election. And we have provided assistance to over 300,000 IDPs in such a short time, and we are now working together with the new Government with increased focus on community-based recovery.

I have a lot of admiration for our civilian and military colleagues, working in some very difficult places as they rebuild infrastructure, resurrect the health system, improve educational facilities and bring peace to this war-torn state. Much more remains to be done, but it is great to be part of a talented UN team that is helping Liberia rise from the ashes and put a very sad chapter in its history behind it forever.

♦



Maj. Peter Ohstenius

Rubber Plantations Under Scrutiny

By Yuko Maeda

In response to gross human rights abuses and widespread mismanagement that leads to a significant loss of state revenue, Liberian Government and the UN have jointly set up a task force to deal with multifaceted issues in the country's rubber plantations.

The task force, comprising of various ministries and public agencies as well as the UN family led by the UN Mission in Liberia, is specifically to look into the cir-

cumstances of four major plantations of Cavalla, Cocopa, Guthrie and Sinoe to find "durable solutions" to generate proper revenue to the national coffers and ensure economic and social rights of the labour communities.

"The task force will address the issues of the conditions of populations living and working in the plantations and to clarify the functioning of the current concession, management and beneficiary arrangements pertaining to these plantations," said Agriculture Minister Christian Toe, who coordinates the work of the task

force, at a press conference on 1 March.

With fertile soil and a tropical climate, Liberia has been rich in natural resources such as diamonds, iron ore and rubber. Previous governments entered concession agreements with private companies over one million acres of rubber plantations, but the plantations in recent years have been reduced to fertile grounds for illicit businesses and exploitation of labourers and environment. Former governments were unable to regulate taxation payments or provide essential services to the plantations. The international community has long voiced grave concerns over such issues.

"Rubber plantations constitute a significant national resource for Liberia," said Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Governance and Recovery, at the press conference. "The revenues they generate should support the reconstruction of the country - the current situation of 'leakage' must stop."

According to a bi-monthly human rights report prepared by the mission's Human Rights and Protection Section, denial of rights, exploitation and mismanagement characterize conditions on Liberia's rubber plantations. In Guthrie and Sinoe plantations, for example, ex-combatants backed by influential political figures terrorise workers including children to force them to tap latex for the former rebels who illegally sell rubber without contributing to the state revenue. Even under civilian management in other plantations, labourers are often denied ade-

UNMIL Report Highlights Denial of

By Yuko Maeda

Hazardous work environment, deplorable living conditions, violence and illegal detention of workers, frequent use of child labour and mismanagement of natural resources are typical characteristics of Liberia's major rubber plantations, says a report issued in early May by the UN Mission in Liberia.

Independent from the National Task Force on Rubber Plantations, the UNMIL Human Rights and Protection

Section conducted a comprehensive study on human rights issues pertaining to the five major rubber plantations -- Firestone, Liberian Agriculture Company, Cavalla, Guthrie and Sinoe. The findings are derived from field assessments, literature reviews and interviews with relevant stakeholders in the last 11 months.

"The failure to respect basic human rights affects every aspect of life on Liberia's rubber plantations," said Dorota Gierycz, head of the human rights office, launching the report,

Human Rights in Liberia's Rubber Plantations: Tapping into the Future. "We undertook a thorough study on what's happening in rubber plantations and what are main human rights abuses there."

Rubber has been one of the major commodities in Liberia, generating an estimated US\$57.4 million from exports in 2002. However, the wealth rubber brings is based on the exploitation of workers and natural resources and doesn't benefit the state coffers. The 88-page report highlights the denial of basic

quate housing, fair wages, proper health-care services and appropriate education opportunities, the report says.

Addressing the media, Ryan pointed out that the UN is concerned about the ongoing tensions between ex-combatants and labourers, child labour practices, physical abuse, a lack of acceptable labour standards and workers' poor living conditions. "It is important that the government assumes effective control over these resources and protects its citizens from violence and abuse," he said.

Environmental damage caused by "pollution and harmful exploitation techniques" is another concern for the task force. "They are generating environmental hazards that threaten the sustainability of people's livelihoods," Ryan cautioned.

The task force is made up of four sub-committees on Security, Legal and Management, Political and Human Rights, and Livelihood Issues, each of which consists of members from the government and the UN family. UNMIL is to put forward inputs from various sections including Civil Affairs, Human Rights and Protection, Gender, Military, and Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Recovery, along with the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the UN Development Programme. From the government side, Ministries of Agriculture, Internal Affairs, Labour, Finance, Defence, Justice and Planning, the National Commission on the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration, and the National Security Agency contribute to the

Rubber Plantations Need Urgent Remedies, Says Task Force

Citing ambiguous and often conflicting concession agreements, absence of law and order at plantations, and lack of protection of workers' labour rights, the Joint Government-UN Rubber Plantations Task Force has concluded that all plantations need immediate holistic remedies to streamline their economic activities and provide a healthier labour life to workers.

The Task Force's final report, submitted to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on 23 May, draws attention to a number of issues based on comprehensive study on seven major plantations across the country. Spread over three months, the Task Force conducted several assessment visits to each plantation under scrutiny, and held extensive consultations with local communities, county officials, workers, NGOs, members of legislative caucuses and representatives of concession holders and management companies.

Among other things, the final report highlights the need to scrutinize all the concession and management agreements and create a standardised contract to ensure corporate obligations in the pro-

tection of labour rights, financial management, taxation, environment, the improvement of living conditions and social services for the plantation communities. Questioning land tenure of several plantations for their low usage, unclear demarcation and ownership, the report also calls for a survey to determine the lease area, timetables for plantation expansion and replanting, and mediation over land disputes between concessionaires and local communities.

Concerning illegal occupancy by ex-combatants at Guthrie and Sinoe plantations, the Task Force calls for urgent action to implement a reintegration package to let them disengage from the plantations and establish a countrywide surveillance system to monitor the movement of rubber to curb illicit business. To improve overall security in the plantation areas, the report recommends the government strengthen law enforcement and judicial institutions.

Seeing the gravity of the issues, Johnson-Sirleaf extended the Task Force's mandate through December 2006. ♦

joint efforts.

Toe said the task force is meant to find "a durable solution" that guarantees appropriate revenue collection, improve the livelihood of Liberians and protect interests of private investors. The team reviews

contractual aspects of the concession agreements, study possibilities of resettlement of ex-combatants, and examine working and living conditions. "All the issues are on the table," Toe said. ♦

Human Rights in Rubber Plantations

human rights of the plantation workers.

The exposure of workers to hazardous working conditions without safety equipment, the denial of worker's rights to fair wages, non-existent or inadequate health care services for workers and their families and the illegal arrest and detention of workers by private security officers are some of the human rights abuses documented in the report, in addition to the negative effect of rubber production on the environment. The report also points out that many concession agreements impose minimal obligations

on plantation management to protect human rights of individuals and communities living and working on the plantations. In Guthrie and Sinoe, the report says ex-combatants still illegally control the plantations, conducting illicit businesses and abusing labourers.

To redress the situation, the human rights office recommends that the government ratify international instruments of labour and human rights standards, review the existing concession agreements and clarify the guidelines on the awarding of concession agreements,

undertake a nationwide investigation into occupational health and safety practices, strengthen the deployment of the national police on the plantations, and immediately deal with ex-combatants illegally occupying the plantations.

"We'll continue monitoring how these abuses are rectified, how the recommendations are implemented," said Gierycz.

The findings and recommendations made by the report have guided the work of the Rubber Plantation Task Force. ♦

TRC to Reconstruct Unified National Memory

By Yuko Maeda

Liberia has officially launched a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate gross human rights abuses committed during 24 years of political turmoil and civil conflict, paving the way to reconstruct “a unifying narrative of the past” and heal the nation’s deep wounds.

The nine-member commission, created under the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement of August 2003 that put an end to the 14-year civil war, is not a court to try crimes against humanity, but rather an institution to investigate abuses of power, economic crimes and gross human rights violations in the past and make recommendations for reconciliation in the society. Although the civil war began in 1989, the commission is to examine abuses committed during the period from 1979, the year of rice riots that triggered a coup in the following year, through 14 October 2003, the day a UN-brokered transitional government was formed, to unearth the root causes of the civil strife.

“Our nation must dig deep into its past and find a way to develop a national truth which we will collectively own and reconcile,” said President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf at the commission’s inaugural ceremony on 22 February as the commissioners took oaths of office. “A nation is a product of its past. In the Truth and Reconciliation, we become the arbiters of our past and take full control of our nation’s destiny if we together build a unified and sanctified narrative of our past.”

The inauguration, which members of Liberia’s three branches of government and representatives of the diplomatic corps and international organisations witnessed, marked a significant step in the country’s long journey to lasting peace and reconcil-



iation since the signing of the Accra peace accord. Following the peace deal, a team of local and international experts including representatives of the UN Mission in Liberia drafted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act that came into law in June 2005. Since then, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has remained active in overseeing the process of selecting the commissioners and in coordinating the TRC working group.

The TRC will investigate all the human rights violations during the period under its mandate and provide an opportunity for both victims and perpetrators to share their experiences “to create a clear picture of the past to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation.” In the process, the commission is expected to pay attention especially to gender-based violence and the issue of child soldiers. And at the end of its two-year mandate, the commission is tasked to compile a report of its findings and make recommendations, which may include recommending

amnesty upon full disclosure or prosecutions. Those suspected of war crimes and crimes against humanity, however, will not be eligible for amnesty.

Jerome Verdier, Sr., a renowned human rights advocate who heads the commission, swore that the commission will collectively draw the maximum strength of diversity in membership to arrive at a national truth. “The end product of our work will justify the trust and high honour you have accorded us... We will follow every lead and pursue the truth without fear or favour. We will be faithful to our mandate, and remain independent and impartial in its pursuit.”

He said the TRC process provides a forum for “constructive interchange” between victims and perpetrators and enhances national reconciliation but not retribution. “In a society polarized by long years of war and civil strife, the TRC process is justified,” he said. “It will give voice to the dead and lay the foundation for a more secure and better future in which democracy and accountability will

flourish and impunity will be a culture of the past.”

Like South Africa that unearthed the painful truth of apartheid, Liberia has chosen the TRC to come to terms with its past.

Alan Doss, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, said: “For many countries emerging from prolonged periods of conflict and wars, truth and reconciliation is one of the surest paths to healing the wounds of the past, confronting impunity, building national peace and security, fostering reconciliation and freeing up the energies of the people to focus on the urgent business of national development.” He then emphasized it is critical for Liberia to thoroughly unearth the past and expose the truth.

As in the past, the international community remains supportive in the reconstruction of national memory. The UN Development Programme has pledged US\$500,000 to help the commission with its operations. The European Union has committed to technical and material assistance valued at €30,000 while UNMIL is to renovate the commission’s temporary offices at the Public Works Ministry and help build the capacity of the commission. “The international community will continue to support various initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of the commission,” Doss said.

The nine-member commission, four of which are women, is working closely with three international technical advisors, two of whom were appointed by ECOWAS and one by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Johnson-Sirleaf called the commission the “people’s hope” and urged the traumatized population to summon courage.

“This Commission is our hope—to define the past on our behalf in terms that are seen and believed to be fair and balanced and bring forth a unifying narrative on which our nation’s rebuilding and renewal processes can be more securely anchored,” she said. “It is our collective challenge as a nation and people to muster the courage required to face, define and use the past as a lever for our leap into the future.” ♦

Cash Boost For TRC



Sulaiman Momodu

By Sulaiman Momodu

In the first week of April 2006, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) announced an agreement to support the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to the tune of US\$600,000. The agreement was signed by United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Liberia, Jordan Ryan, and TRC chairperson, Counsellor Jerome Verdier.

The ceremony was held in the cramped TRC office, which hardly had enough chairs for visitors. Verdier described the office as “humble.” The lack of a proper office and other facilities speaks volumes of the challenges that lie ahead as the Commission begins its work.

Recognising the work of major stakeholders including ECOWAS, the European Union and the UN, the Commission’s chairperson said the cash boost from UNDP will significantly help the TRC to move forward with its work. He also acknowledged the collaboration extended by UNMIL’s Human Rights Section to the Commission.

With a planned budget of US\$2.3 million for the preparatory period, the Commission has been constrained by shortage of resources and has been able to organise only moderate outreach activities. Verdier stressed that the inputs of all Liberians is very important and called on civil society, the national government, religious institutions and other sectors of society, including ex-combatants, to participate in the work of the

Commission.

Ryan reflected on Liberia’s 14-year history of war characterised by murder, torture, rape and the general absence of democracy and human rights. “Today’s Liberia is different. It is a nation ready to embrace a brighter future.”

Ryan said UNDP was pleased to provide US\$600,000 in support of the TRC. Applauding the fact that the Government intends to let the TRC function freely, he noted that the Commission can play a special role to address gross human rights violations during the conflict, promote peace-building and reconciliation, and strengthen democracy.

He said TRCs can help by “restoring public trust in national institutions of governance” and expressed the hope that in Liberia, like in many other countries, the TRC will adopt a forward-looking approach and help in framing recommendations for peace-building and reintegration into society of those accused of less grave crimes. He thanked those who have contributed to the work of the Commission and appealed to other donors to come forward with additional resources to fund the important work of the TRC.

ECOWAS Ambassador to Liberia, Ansumana Ceesay, expressed gratitude on behalf of his organisation to the UN system for “starting the ball rolling” to raise funds for the Commission. He urged other people, including Liberians, to step forward to support the work of the Commission.

TRC’s real work is scheduled to begin on 22 June. Another US\$10 million is required to complete the two-year job.

STARK REALITY

With the infrastructure in tatters, restoring electricity is a massive challenge

Let There Be Light

By Sulaiman Momodu and J. Wesley Washington

Restoring electricity supply to Liberia is a high priority for President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, whose election victory as Africa's first female president recently electrified the country and the world. On assuming office, she promised to bring power back to parts of Monrovia, capital of the country that had been groping in darkness for many years now, by 26 July, Liberia's Independence Day. All eyes are now set on this date.

As part of this priority effort, the government of Liberia in March signed an agreement with the European Commission (EC) and the governments of Ghana and the United States for an Emergency Power Programme, worth US\$7 million dollars. The agreement would lead to switching on electricity in three neighbourhoods (Kru Town, Capitol Hill and Congo Town) in Monrovia by the deadline, in accordance with the President's 150-day deliverables.

Before the war, Monrovia used to enjoy 24-hour power supply with the Mt. Coffee Hydro Plant supplying the capital and the rest of the country in the rainy season and the Bong Mine Company stepping in during the dry season when the water level usually dropped.

With the Hydro Plant power supply

base in ruins and the Mine Company completely destroyed, today, most residents heavily rely on candles and lanterns to brighten their homes at night. In most parts of Monrovia, flickering light from hurricane lamps or the local *Jako* lantern can be seen dotting the streets as small business operators try to eke out a living. The few people who can afford tiny generators do so by rationing and contend with the humming noise which the small machines generate, while a small fraction of the population uses bigger generators, especially in the capital's business district. Most community and health facilities, such as hospitals and police stations, reel under the lack of power supply.

At a press conference in Monrovia in early April, Geoffrey Rudd, Charge d'Affaires of the EC Delegation in Liberia, told journalists that a high-powered mission had paid a week-long visit to the country from Brussels and Abidjan. Among other things, the mission was in Monrovia to discuss the emergency power project. "This is an emergency project. The idea is to bring light to some sections of the city and to cover essential services particularly health centres, hospitals, schools, police, among others," said Rudd.

The agreement on the Emergency Power Programme paves the way for starting construction of the necessary facilities and to obtain required equipment from the

Volta River facilities in Ghana. As part of the programme, the EC, Ghana and US will provide technical assistance, including providing generators and supervising their installation. Already, three structures have been built to house the machines in securely fenced areas.

The EC is also working with the government to rehabilitate the electrical network to benefit residential areas in the capital as part of a mid-term electricity project in which the private sector will play a major part. Electricity for rural Liberia is also being considered. This will be done by transferring generators from the emergency programme once the medium-term project has taken off.

Liberians are being urged to have a sense of ownership for the facilities and not to do anything that will disrupt the system. "The people have a responsibility, the government and the donors have a responsibility. The project will not be a success unless all the people work together," Rudd stressed.

Considering the level of devastation Liberia has suffered as a result of the prolonged civil war, revamping the power supply base will invariably require huge capital and effort. As Liberians wait for 26 July with high expectations to see lights again, one thing is clear -- restoring electricity to the whole country will remain a massive challenge for a long time. ♦

IMF to Monitor Economic Governance

By Yuko Maeda

In an effort to get the country's massive external debt written off, Liberia has agreed to place its macroeconomic programme under close surveillance of the International Monetary Fund by allowing the IMF staff to monitor the government's economic performance for the period from February through September 2006.

The Fund's surveillance scheme Staff-monitored Programme (SMP) is meant for the international financial institution to monitor the implementation of the government's "ambitious" economic and financial reform agenda. Under the SMP, the IMF staff check quantitative targets and structural benchmarks to see the government's performance in rebuilding key public institutions, restoring credible financial management and accelerating structural reforms.

"While it is too early to be precise about a timetable for debt relief for Liberia, successful implementation of the SMP is an important first step in achieving this goal," said Robert Powell, Chief of the IMF Mission for Liberia, in his statement issued at the end of his consultative visit from February 16 through March 1. Liberia has accumulated an estimated US\$3.7 billion in debt, including about US\$750 million to the IMF, another US\$510 million to the World Bank and US\$200 million to the African Development Bank, all of them incurred during the previous governments.

Based on a report by the IMF mission, its Executive Board concluded the annual consultation with Liberia in late April, welcoming the agreement over SMP which was officially signed in mid-April. "Strengthening public financial management, improving economic governance and rebuilding essential capacity and infrastructure are essential to place Liberia on a path toward sustained economic

recovery and poverty reduction," stressed IMF in a summary report issued on 2 May.

According to IMF, the Liberian economy has been continuously recovering since 2004, largely driven by strong donor inflows and a revival of rural activities following the improved security situation and the return of refugees and internally displaced people. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to have grown



Finance Minister Antoinette Sayeh

by 5.3 per cent in 2005, following a modest growth of 2.6 per cent in 2004. For 2006, further economic growth recovery is anticipated with a forecast of 7.7 per cent GDP growth.

The anticipated surge in growth in 2006 is partly attributed to measures taken by the new government under President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to tackle long-standing problems in financial management and economic governance. The IMF commends such measures as the enforcement of pre-shipment inspections for imports and exports, more prudent allotments of

national budget for line ministries, and a thorough review of all concessions and contracts signed by the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), which governed the country for two years during the transitional period that followed the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The NTGL had come under severe criticism by the international community for widespread corruption, massive leakage of the state coffers and mismanagement of natural resources.

Although the IMF Executive Board welcomed the new government's endorsement of the anti-graft mechanism Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program, GEMAP, the international financial agency urges Liberia take more decisive steps to strengthen economic governance. Among other things, the IMF calls for the development of an effective and transparent budgeting process, a review of the extensive list of duty exemptions, strengthening of the regulatory functions of the Central Bank of Liberia, and the empowerment of the main revenue-generating agencies.

"A key element of the government's strategy in the short run will be to achieve significant progress in rebuilding key government institutions," Powell said in his statement. "In the coming months, the (IMF) mission will review progress under the SMP and discuss with the government its plans for a poverty reduction strategy and for the 2006/07 budget."

Finance Minister Antoinette Sayeh vowed to extend the government's full cooperation to the IMF. "We hope the successful execution of the programme would pave the way toward a subsequent Fund-supported arrangement and eventually lead to the resolution of Liberia's debt overhang," she wrote in a letter to the IMF in mid-April. "The government will provide the IMF staff with all information that it requests to assess the implementation of the Staff-monitored Programme." ♦

Photo: Courtesy IMF

Voice of the People

"During the war life was hard for me because the man kept saying 'you want me or I should kill you'. So I say 'O I want you'. Now I don't want that man – life now is fine because I'm going to school and learning something good for myself."

Kardir, a former child soldier

By Deirdre Martin

On a Tuesday morning in March, Kardir was among a number of former child soldiers who spoke on UNMIL Radio's *Around Town* programme, live from Voinjama, Lofa County. And there were more -- a County Superintendent, an Imam, widows, a former commander of a rebel group, a farmer, a teacher, a Labour Ministry official, and a hawker, among others.

Around Town is a 90-minute programme designed to give a voice to the people -- ordinary people, extraordinary people, market women, labourers, the jobless, children, the disabled, students and ex-combatants. Wherever the programme travels, the microphone is open to whoever wants to talk and be heard live across the country.

For the past year, the programme has been running every Thursday from all corners of the capital Monrovia, with people talking on issues as wide ranging as garbage, the lack of toilet facilities, what it means to be a Liberian, how to deal with the violent past, girls' education, rape and domestic violence, the police and justice system, how the society treats its children, national elections and UN sanctions.



Voices...

Deirdre Martin

During the election period it was a chance for the people to tell the political hopefuls what it was they wanted in their future leaders, and what they saw as the critical issues -- jobs, free education for kids, decent roads, and leaders who won't steal government money.

This year the programme has moved into new territory, broadcasting also on Tuesdays, from the counties, to hear from those who have returned to their homes up-country. What is life like now they are back "home"? What are the challenges they face each day as they struggle to feed their kids and send them to school? How are they resolving differences? What are they doing to rebuild their communities? What do they expect of the new government? What would they say to the President if they had the chance?

Up until early May, the programme had travelled to Harper, Buchanan, Tubmanburg, Zwedru, Kakata, Ganta, Voinjama, Gbarnga, Careysburg and Bopulu.

In Harper, the crew set up on the main street, opposite the high school. Heavily pregnant Ester was one of the first in line: "We are happy for our life because we are



Opinions...

not running away from war anymore," she said. Her message to the Government: "We want development because things are going backwards. I will pray to God...I want the Government to educate our chil-

dren and fix our streets.” Diamond, a senior high school student, said he was happy to be studying in Harper as he didn’t have to bribe the teachers: “We get a better education than in Monrovia as we strain our

something to the President I would ask her to open the former college so that we who want to graduate can get our education here.”

Eliza said she was alive “by God’s



Deirdre Martin

Views...



Deirdre Martin

own brain to do the work.” He wanted to continue his education after high school, but the problem was there was no college in the county and it would not be possible for him to go to Monrovia. “If I could say

grace” as she had neither a job nor anyone to support her. “I really want the government to open a vocational school so that we can learn.”

In Buchanan, jobs, education and agriculture were among the prime concerns of the people. “People are sufferin’ because there are no jobs...there are people who are trying to farm but it is not enough – they need seeds and crops to plant... there are no seeds,” said one old man. Alfred, a nurse, said they needed better medical facilities: “I need a hospital to be opened for me to do a better job and save life!”

In Tubmanburg, the programme broadcast from outside a ruined building overlooking the main intersection in town. Leroy, a young man, was one of those who spoke emotionally about the problem of rape: “There are big pappas around here and they have everything at their disposal and they get our little sisters and they spoil them...and this is very bad for our society.” Helen worked for an NGO in Tubmanburg: “Some of them are doing it (rape) for ritual, some are doing it for position, some of them are just wicked...imagine, they are raping four and five year olds...the President should focus in that

direction so that the men will be prosecuted so we can have a civilized society.”

Another concern raised by a number of speakers in Tubmanburg was the state of the market there. Miatta, an older woman, cried when she told how her husband had died in the war and she had no money to send her children to school or return to her home in Lofa: “We are tryin’ to sell in the market and it’s leaking! Children not going to school, no money – so we want help to fix the market, so we can sell and then pay back.”

In Voinjama, the *Around Town* crew set up at “the Triangle,” opposite the bus station in the centre of town. The mechanics at the garage next door kindly laid down tools and switched off their generator while the programme broadcast. Word had passed around that the host Othello Yarsiah was in town, and queues formed quickly. “I am too happy to see my home at this time...I can see thousands of people going around and doing their normal activities...one of the things that makes me happy is that at least we have freedom of movement, nobody harassing you, I mean I am too impressed to see these things going on because I didn’t think I was ever going to see that happen in Liberia anymore,” says a young man. Next in line was a slight teenager with a fancy hairdo. She told the story of how her father was killed in front of her during the war and how she was taken away by the fighters. She is now enrolled in a UNICEF training programme, learning to be a hairdresser and beautician. “Life now is good for me,” she said.

Assisted by a little wizardry from the technical crew, the programme has been able to broadcast live nationally from any location within 10 kilometres of an UNMIL telephone line. UNMIL Radio technician Rifet Arapovic says that, using satellite technology, the programme will soon be able to broadcast from virtually anywhere in Liberia -- which, in the coming months, leaves the rains and impassable roads as the major challenges for getting *Around Town* around the country to get the voices of the people on the airwaves. ♦

***Around Town* broadcasts every Tuesday and Thursday at 9.30am on UNMIL Radio.**

High Public Opinion Ratings for UNMIL

By Yuko Maeda

Liberians rate the work of the UN Mission in Liberia very highly in providing security and conducting numerous community-oriented development projects, according to a public opinion survey commissioned by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

The survey, conducted in January by a team of the City College of New York under adjunct professor Jean Krasno, was to assess how the host population views the work of UNMIL. Nearly 800 people from 13 out of 15 counties from all walks of life, from teenagers to senior citizens, participated in the survey. The team released a report of its findings in March.

According to the survey report, 94 per cent of the respondents believed the overall security situation has improved under UNMIL. More than 90 per cent said UNMIL has done a good or very good job in making them feel safe and in implementing the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The majority of the people surveyed also responded favourably about the disarmament process. However, about one out of 10 participants expressed concern that the UN had not completed the disarmament process, pointing out that arms were still stashed away, especially at some rubber plantations occupied by ex-combatants.

While nine in 10 respondents said the retraining of the police by the mission was very good or good, less than one in three expressed confidence in the effectiveness of the police. This correlates with the view of 88 per cent of the participants that UNMIL should stay longer in Liberia to maintain security. "This is an area of serious concern for the future security situation inside the country," says the report.

UNMIL's development projects and communication with the local population are other areas the people surveyed rate highly. More than 65 per cent of the respondents see the UN peacekeepers have gone beyond their regular duties of providing security to help rebuild the communi-

ty. Answering open-ended narrative questions, the respondents commended the peacekeepers for their work in constructing or renovating roads and bridges, shelters, health clinics and schools and in providing free medical care, food and clothing. A vast majority of the respondents -- 97 per cent -- rated UNMIL Radio good or very good in its ability to get information out to the local population. Many noted that it has been an important channel of communication with the rest of the country and the world.

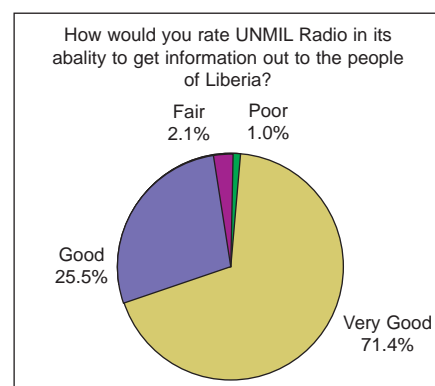
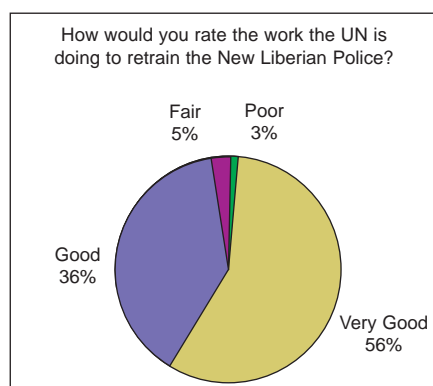
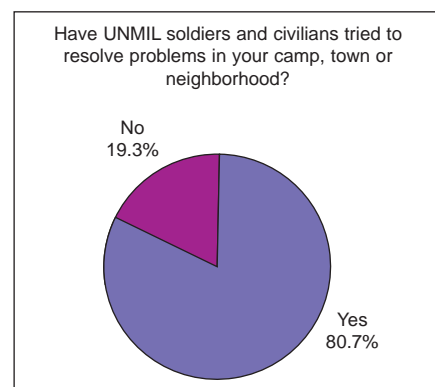
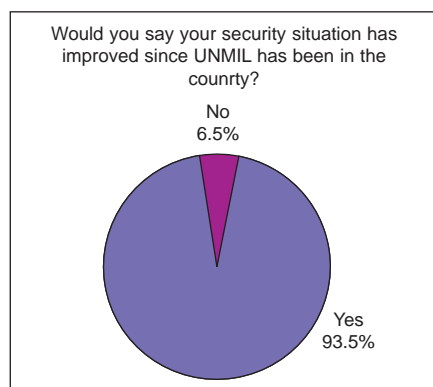
An overwhelming 94 per cent of respondents said that UNMIL had done a great job in ensuring the 2005 elections were fair, transparent and violent-free. Many of them said UNMIL had provided a safe and secure environment for the voting process while others appreciated the logistical support and voter education through the radio and other media outlets.

Although overall ratings are highly positive, the survey found some concerns and issues surrounding the peacekeepers' conduct. About one in five participants complained that peacekeepers had raped

women and young children and contributed to the encouragement of prostitution among young girls, leading them to drop out of school. "While this is an opinion survey and not a fact-finding report, these responses indicate perception of a serious problem and a full investigation should be made into these complaints of sexual abuse and exploitation," the report concludes.

Overall the report sums up the findings: "While there were serious complaints about sexual abuse by some peacekeepers, most of the people who participated in the survey felt that the UN had done a very good job providing security and assisting the peaceful outcome of the 2005 elections."

Alan Doss, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, welcomed the public opinion survey. "We are very pleased by the strong support that this survey shows for UNMIL," he said of the largely positive rating. "However, we are very conscious of the need to further strengthen our efforts to prevent and deal with sexual abuse and exploitation." •



Liberia Among “Forgotten Stories”

Development challenges facing Liberia topped the United Nations 2006 list of the “10 Stories the World Should Hear More About” that was unveiled in New York on 15 May, aiming to spotlight international issues that deserve greater media attention.

In addition to Liberia’s “obstacle-strewn road of transition” from war to peace, the world’s 10 most under-reported stories this year include the threat posed to the peace process by the “hate media” in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire, the security vacuum that compounds the drought situation in Somalia and the plight of children caught up in the conflict in Nepal.

Concerned that some issues continue not to receive sustained media attention or slip off the radar screen, the United



Shashi Tharoor: Drawing attention to “stories that must be told”

Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) first launched the list of 10 under-

reported stories in 2004. The list is not meant to be representative of the UN’s agenda.

As in previous years, the 2006 list covers a spectrum of issues and geographical regions, some of which draw on troubling humanitarian emergencies and conflict situations while others focus on such vital areas as human rights and development.

“In today’s round-the-clock media world, reporters often find themselves flooded with news, and sometimes urgent and important stories are simply overlooked,” Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Shashi Tharoor said at the launch of this year’s list of stories that have escaped the glare of media attention. “Our goal is to draw attention to those stories that must be told,” he stressed.

10 Stories the world should hear more about



Liberia: Development challenges top agenda as the nation recovers from years of civil strife

Setting off on an obstacle-strewn road of transitioning from a vicious war to stable peace and development, the nation grapples with an array of critical challenges that often escape the glare of world media.

The Story

As Liberia emerges from the shadows of a devastating 14-year civil war, the aftershocks of its past history of ethnic hatred, violence and corruption, and the arrest on war crimes charges of former president Charles Taylor, tend to draw the most intensive media attention. There is, however, an equally dramatic story of the formidable challenges facing the country in its efforts to bring a semblance of normalcy to what has been a non-functioning state with no civil services of any kind. The effects of economic mismanagement,

corrupt government, administrative abuse and infrastructure collapse were compounded by the socio-economic and humanitarian impact of sanctions. The importance of this undertaking is hard to overestimate since any progress towards greater stability and security depends on how quickly basic services are restored and the economic engine restarted. “Experience has taught us that an incomplete effort in consolidating the peace is often a prelude to renewed conflict,” says Alan Doss, Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s Special Representative in the country and head of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which played a vital role in the stabilization of the country and remains a key force in laying the foundation for durable peace and stability.

Africa’s first woman head of state, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who won the recent UN-organized elections, faces

numerous pressing tasks ahead as the nation attempts to get past the trauma of its long civil war and proceed with its development agenda. These include the reintegration of ex-combatants, the resettlement of internally displaced persons and returning refugees, creating jobs and other income-earning opportunities, the repair and rehabilitation of infrastructure destroyed during the war, the restructuring and reform of the armed forces and police service, the consolidation of State authority throughout the country, and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A major key to revenue growth is installing mechanisms to meet the conditions for lifting the UN-imposed sanctions on exports of Liberian timber and diamonds, which would provide revenues for national reconstruction and economic recovery. ♦

UN Expert Urges Liberia Reform Judiciary

By Yuko Maeda

Expressing serious concerns over Liberia's weak judicial system, a visiting UN expert in human rights urged the new government to speed up judicial reform to guarantee justice and suggested appointing foreign jurists as mentors in the interim period.

Dr. Charlotte Abaka, UN Independent Expert on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Liberia, said that despite positive developments in the judiciary, "the continuing denial of due process" remains of great concern due to lack of qualified and experienced judges, prosecutors and public defenders. "Judicial reform must be a priority for the new government," she told reporters at a press conference in Monrovia during her short visit in February.

She urged the government to consider the employment of foreign judges as an interim measure. "Justice cannot wait," she said, pointing out that the current crop of judges and magistrates lack the capacity to implement laws and respect due process in accordance with international standards. "For the interim, Liberia's judicial body can get foreign judges as mentors to build the capacity of the judiciary."

Abaka was in Liberia to gather first-hand knowledge of the country's human rights situation to update her report to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. She was scheduled to make an oral report on Liberia at the HRC's annual convention in March through April.

In her week-long visit to the country from February 19 through 26, Abaka met with Liberia's new leadership including President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Labour Minister Kofi Woods and representatives of the diplomatic corps, international agencies and the UN family including the UN Mission in Liberia.

During her meeting with Johnson-

Sirleaf, Abaka recommended the president establish an independent Law Reform Commission to review existing laws, repeal outdated laws and enact new legislation that conform with the international legal instruments. "Such a body could play a pivotal role in reviewing instances of discriminatory legislation and in ensuring that traditional practices are consistent with statutory law," she said.

With Woods, an internationally well-known human rights advocate, Abaka raised such issues as widespread child labour practice, deteriorating working conditions in plantations and lack of labour welfare standards. "The international community and UNMIL must assist the Ministry of Labour to implement the international labour instruments," she said in a separate interview.

At the press conference, Abaka also addressed concerns over inhuman conditions in prisons and detention centres, poor management of orphanages, allegations of child trafficking and an increase of rape

cases while commending Liberia's progress in human rights arena such as the completion of appointment of judges and magistrates, the enactment of the new Rape Law and the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She called on the government to "give urgent attention to improving detention conditions" and to review the Adoption Law to curb child trafficking.

She also urged the international community to show greater commitment to the achievement of economic, social and cultural rights of ordinary Liberians by providing both financial means and technical assistance.

Abaka was first appointed as an independent expert on Liberia's human rights in October 2003 and has since returned to the country every six months. This was her fifth visit. She is scheduled to return to Liberia in July or August to review new developments in the country's human rights situation and plans to make field trips to rural Liberia. •

Charlotte Abaka addresses the media



Empowering Local Authorities

By Sulaiman Momodu

In an effort to extend state authority to the counties and promote the development agenda of Liberia, UNMIL, in collaboration with the UN country team and the Liberian government, organized an orientation workshop in mid-May in Monrovia, targeting County Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents and County Support Team (CST) facilitators.

The workshop was aimed at promoting greater collaboration between the UN and the local authorities through the CST mechanism, in addition to fostering awareness of how UN resources and tools could contribute to the restoration of state authority and the realization of the nation's development agenda.

Welcoming the participants, Deputy

Special Representative Jordan Ryan said Liberia's new day must start in the villages and reiterated UN's resolve to work with the County authorities on issues of health, education, protection and human rights.



Sulaiman Momodu

Topics discussed at the workshop included the role of the government and its partners in the national development process, economic revitalization, basic services and infrastructure, gender issues,

sexual exploitation and abuse, HIV/AIDS, media/public information, and human rights and protection. Security, governance and rule of law were also covered.

As part of a package of support to the County authorities, 15 vehicles were presented to the Superintendents jointly by Ryan and UNDP Country Director Steve Ursino. The Minister for Internal Affairs Ambulai Johnson said the assistance was "an indication that the Superintendents would be empowered to commence their work that has been assigned to them."

The workshop was attended by UNMIL's Civil Affairs staff from the counties and by the Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, Toga McIntosh, who made a presentation on the government's vision of local development and the role of local authorities. ♦

Central Bank Payment Centre in Tubmanburg

By J Wesley Washington

Liberia's civil servants based in outlying counties who were forced to travel to capital Monrovia every month-end to collect their pay checks now have something to smile about. With the inauguration of a new payment centre of the Central Bank of Liberia in Tubmanburg, constructed through UNMIL's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), they no longer have to make the monthly trek to the capital to collect their hard earned money.

The Tubmanburg payment centre is expected to serve approximately 2,500 civil servants in Bomi, and the neighbouring counties of Grand Cape Mount and Gbarpolu. It will also enable customs and revenue agents to deposit funds and avoid the need for frequent travel to the Central Bank in Monrovia.

"The ceremony today is a testimony of UNMIL's commitment to advance the restoration and consolidation of state

authority throughout Liberia," said Special Representative Alan Doss at the opening of the payment centre on 16 May. In addition to two similar payment centres nearing completion in Voinjama and Zwedru,



discussions were underway over the construction of three more centres in Grand

Kru, Sinoe and Maryland counties, Doss added.

Doss encouraged commercial banks to extend their operations beyond the capital city to spur economic growth and investments. "The channelling of funds through functioning commercial banks is critical for domestic resource mobilization which in turn is vital for savings, investment and economic expansion," he said.

UNMIL through its QIPs funds community-oriented small-scale, quick-impact and highly visible infrastructure projects aimed at helping Liberia recover from its prolonged civil war.

As of March 2006, UNMIL has approved 232 projects costing approximately US\$3 million. Located throughout the country, these projects include the renovation of schools, clinics, court houses, prison facilities, government offices, and markets and police stations. Other projects cover road repairs and the construction of wells and latrines. ♦

Appeal for Urgent Humanitarian Aid

By Yuko Maeda

Acknowledging urgent needs in humanitarian assistance to stabilise the war-torn country, a visiting UN-led multi-donor team reiterated the international partners' commitment to Liberia's recovery especially in speeding up resettlement of uprooted populations and reinstalling a mechanism of basic social services.

"You cannot do stabilise the country unless (displaced) people settle down," said Dennis McNamara, head of the multi-donor mission on displaced population that visited Liberia from 19 to 24 February. "Liberia's recovery programme depends on the settling of the displaced population. There cannot be peace-building and reconstruction where there is shifting of people by displacement."

During 14 years of back-to-back civil conflict, a million people fled their homes to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and other parts of Liberia. Before the UN launched the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in November 2004, there were about 314,000 people sheltering in 35 camps, mostly on the outskirts of Monrovia. As of mid-February nearly 300,000 registered IDPs had left the camps to start anew with assistance from the UNHCR and its humanitarian partners.

"The remaining IDPs want to go home before the rainy season starts. We hope we

can achieve that goal," said McNamara, Director of the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, at a press conference held at the headquarters of the UN Mission in Liberia. By late April, all the remaining IDPs have gone home.

The six-member team, including ambassadors to the UN Office in Geneva from the UK, Sweden and Norway, came to Liberia to identify the needs in humanitarian assistance and examine the role of the humanitarian actors in accordance with a new inter-agency approach dubbed "cluster approach." The new sector-wide approach, in which UN and non-UN agencies collaborate to assess the humanitarian needs, develop policies and deliver assistance sector by sector, has been developed to fill the gaps in response to humanitarian crises such as natural disasters and civil wars. Liberia recently adopted that approach as one of three test cases worldwide. Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia, chairs the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Country Team, which coordinates the cluster approach in Liberia.

In their week-long stay, the multi-donor team met with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and other top government officials as well as the leadership of UNMIL, the UN country team and NGO

partners.

While McNamara praised the leadership of the new government as "very impressive, very committed people," he acknowledged Liberia faces enormous challenges ahead and the country needs international partners' massive assistance to meet the challenges. "We have a chance here. Liberia has a real chance of being a success story for Africa. We have to invest in peace-building," he told the media, calling on the humanitarian actors to address the urgent needs in building "emergency" roads to bring people home, reinstalling the rule of law and justice system and providing more jobs, running water, electricity and health services. "The next six months is absolutely critical."

Addressing the media, British Ambassador Nicholas Thorne said Liberia has reached a point where the country moves forward from humanitarian crisis to more organized development phase. "Lots of work still need to be done. We'll be here to support your country as you progress."

Swedish Ambassador Elisabet Borsiin Bonnier reiterated the commitment of the donor community. "We join hands behind the enormous projects we work in Liberia. Everybody works for the same goals."

The findings of the team are expected to reflect in funding programmes to support urgent humanitarian activities. ♦

Sanctions Committee Visits Liberia

By Sulaiman Momodu

On a visit to Liberia in early April, the Security Council Sanctions Committee on Liberia, led by Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Løj, lauded the country's new government for its efforts to meet the benchmarks that would eventually lead to the lifting of sanctions, but fell short of saying when the sanctions would be lifted. The Committee's visit came ahead of the review of the sanctions by the UN Security Council in June.

"I have had discussions with several

members of the cabinet, parliament, UN and other actors in Liberia focusing specifically on the sanctions on timbers and diamonds. My personal impression is that the government is working hard to meet the benchmarks set out by the Security Council," said Løj, who is the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN.

"My conclusion from the discussions is that a lot is being done but we are not quite there yet, so it is important that the momentum is kept up so that the Security Council would be able sometime in the not too distant future to lift the sanctions."

Løj said sanctions were not introduced by the Security Council to punish the Liberian people but to protect the country's resources for the benefit of the people. She said part of her discussions centred on how the people should benefit from these resources. The United Nations slammed a ban on Liberian diamond exports in 2001 and on timber in 2003 on the grounds that the resources were being used to fuel war in the region.

While in Liberia, Ambassador Løj and her delegation also paid an assessment visit to Lofa County and Buchanan. ♦

Multi-donor Mission on Women Visits

By Sulaiman Momodu

A multi-donor mission visited Liberia early April to review existing partnership strategies among the mission components, the UN Country Team, the host government and civil society groups for implementing Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted five years ago and provides a mandate and framework for responding to the specific concerns of women in conflict and post-conflict environments, in addition to harnessing their skills and capacities.

The delegation assessed achievements in Liberia to date and analyzed the factors that have contributed to successes; reviewed outstanding gaps and challenges and identified mechanisms and interventions that are needed to address these in future. The mission also reviewed the approaches and strategies guiding the work of gender advisers and how these can be further strengthened and supported.

The review team had consultations with UNMIL's leadership, staff in different functional areas, UN partners, the host government and civil society representa-



Sulaiman Momodu

tives as well as donor representatives in the country. A field visit was also organised to review a YWCA project for skills-training for women ex-combatants in Buchanan.

The team expressed delight at the presence of more uniformed women among the peacekeeping contingents in UNMIL and expressed the hope that troop contributing countries will deploy more women in future. The delegation praised

the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Liberia and urged women not to shy off from testifying.

The delegation, comprising Siri Theresa Johansen and Katarina Vikør Guro of Norway, Jeremy Stickings and Bennet Alex from the United Kingdom, and Eva Van Woersen from Netherlands, was accompanied by DPKO Gender Adviser Comfort Lamptey. ♦

Japanese Donation to Liberia's Children

More than 5,000 demobilised child soldiers are now able to go back to school or attend vocational training as the children's agency UNICEF has received US\$6.78 million from the Japanese government.

The money will support a major part of the UNICEF's interventions to reintegrate 11,780 children who were demobilised during the UN-led disarmament and demobilisation process which ended late 2004. The UN agency is leading the country's Reintegration and Rehabilitation process for children, offering the demobilised former child soldiers two options: free basic primary education with psychosocial care or skills training and apprenticeship with basic literacy and

small business management education.

"We are profoundly grateful to the Government of Japan for their continued commitment to assist Liberia's vulnerable children," said UNICEF Liberia Representative Angela Kearney. Japan earlier this year contributed US\$2.21 million to the UN agency to protect children from infectious diseases. "It is indeed a new day for Liberia and a huge step for Liberia's kids."

In addition to assisting 5,445 demobilised child soldiers, UNICEF uses the money to develop community-based support structures to help reintegrate another 5,000 vulnerable children such as war orphans in seven counties of Bomi, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Maryland,

Montserrado and Nimba.

Japan's recent contribution also enables UNICEF and its partners to provide 300 schools and 50 health centres with new water and environmental sanitation services in those counties. At least 225,000 people are expected to receive safe water supply and about 15,000 families in 500 communities will benefit from hygiene promotion education.

"The new funding for UNICEF Liberia is part of my government's strong support of life changing sustainable development programmes in sub-Saharan Africa," said Japan's Ambassador to Ghana, Masamichi Ishikawa. ♦

Global Leadership Award for Liberia's President

In recognition of her efforts to advance women's rights, the UN Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, presented its first Global Leadership Award to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on the occasion of its 30th anniversary celebrated in May.

Johnson-Sirleaf is the first democratically elected female head of state in Africa, where traditionally men dominate every aspect of social, economic and political life. The path to her crowning glory has been characterized by many years of personal struggle in pursuit of her education and career as well as imprisonment for her political convictions.

Nicole Kidman, UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador and internationally acclaimed actress, presented the award on 15 May at a gala event she hosted in New York to honour the UN agency's work for three decades. "Commemorating UNIFEM's 30th anniversary is a special opportunity for me to bring its accomplishments to the attention of a larger audience," said Kidman.

Speaking on the thirty years of



Photo: Courtesy UNIFEM

UNIFEM's efforts to empower women and improve their lives, Executive Director Noeleen Heyzer hailed the progress achieved so far and acknowledged the importance of partners in the agency's work. "I have witnessed how investing in women's leadership and participation has brought about economic and social transformation," she said. She also cautioned that much remains to be done. "My wish is for a strong UNIFEM to reach more people with the power to change the conditions under which women work and

live, making the world a more just, equitable and happier place for all."

Along with Johnson-Sirleaf, Terry J. Lundgren, CEO of Federated Department Stores, parent company of Macy's department store, received UNIFEM's first Global Championship Award for efforts to support the Rwanda Path to Peace project. Macy's flagship store in New York has been selling the traditional baskets woven by Rwanda genocide widows to help develop a global market for them. ♦

World Bank Pledges Full Support

In a meeting with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the World Bank's top official pledged full support for Liberia's efforts in reconstruction and recovery, making another commitment of US\$25 million to infrastructure development.

WB President Paul Wolfowitz met with Johnson-Sirleaf at the Bank's headquarters in Washington DC during her trip to the US in March, according to a news release by the Bank.

Applauding Johnson-Sirleaf's leadership in national reconstruction and institutional reform, Wolfowitz promised support for resolving the issue of Liberia's US\$510 million debt to the World Bank, agreed to send a full country representa-

tive to the war-ravaged country to work with her administration, and assured her to host a donor conference later this year.



Liberian President Johnson-Sirleaf with WB President Paul Wolfowitz

"We admire what you and your colleagues are doing to build a new Liberia," Wolfowitz told Johnson-Sirleaf. "We at the World Bank are proud to be partners

with you."

As a start, the Bank pledged the money to a fund for much-needed infrastructure development, especially for road construction.

"We are very pleased with the strong support which we are receiving from the Bank and President Wolfowitz," Johnson-Sirleaf was quoted as saying. She appreciated the Bank's commitment to Liberia, especially in the areas of development and economic governance. "The Bank is helping us in our infrastructure work and the review of the concession agreements that will lead to better management of our own resources. We hope they will now be able to help us develop a strategy to achieve our development goals." ♦

Photo: Courtesy World Bank

Bangladeshi Troops Win Liberian Hearts

By J. Wesley Washington

“Win the Hearts and Minds of the People” is a slogan Bangladeshi peacekeepers are reminded of daily as they serve Liberians. From providing security to treating the sick and injured to teaching ex-combatants vocational skills, the Bangladeshi soldiers work diligently to keep up its reputation as one of the most respected troops in UN peacekeeping operations around the world.

Bangladesh is among the first troop contributing countries that set up the military component of the UN Mission in Liberia, sending its advanced party of 80 soldiers from Sierra Leone on 8 October 2003. Bangladesh has since grown to the largest contingent in the mission's 15,000-strong military component representing 49 countries, with over 3,000 troops on the ground at present.

Assigned in Sector III, which includes Bong, Grand Bassa and Nimba counties, the Bangladeshi military fortifies the Sector headquarters at CARI Complex in Gbarnga and deploys three infantry battalions - BANBATT-5, 6 and 7 - in 28 locations throughout the three counties. Also included in the contingent are two engineering companies - BANENGR-3 and 4 - in the Sector headquarters and Ganta, a medical team BANMED-2, a signal unit BANSIG-2, a logistics unit BANLOG-2, and a military police unit BANMIP-2, all at CARI Complex.

Patrolling by vehicles, foot and air, the contingent maintains security in their area of operation that includes a very porous border with Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire with several major entry and exit points through which people and goods cross.

Since their deployment over two years ago, the Bangladeshi Contingent has scored a significant number of achieve-

ments. During UNMIL's successful disarmament and demobilisation process, Bangladeshi peacekeepers disarmed nearly 30,000 ex-combatants including more than 6,500 women and nearly 3,000 children, which account for about 30 per cent of the total ex-combatants demobilised in the entire country. During the 2005 national elections, the troops guaranteed a secure environment for Liberians to participate in the electoral process without fear, providing security at 451 polling precincts and logistical support for the electoral staff.

Apart from the major task of maintaining security, Bangladeshis also conduct various humanitarian activities to help develop the community they serve. The engineering companies rehabilitate and maintain roads and bridges along the Gbarnga-Zorzor, Gbarnga-Kakata and the Gbarnga-Ganta highways. BANMED provides medical and surgical services to the local population in addition to the military and civilian staff of the mission. The contingent also undertakes small-scale community projects to engage directly with the local population.

For example, the Level II Hospital has treated over 120,000 local patients since its opening in January 2004. With 60 medical professionals including 12 doctors, the hospital currently offers free medical treatment and medicines to scores of local

patients daily. “We do our best to give them medicines from our meagre stock provided by our government,” said Lt. Col. Dr. Ashraful Alam Siddique, Medical Commander.

With their goodwill gestures, Bangladeshis have certainly won Liberians' hearts. “We heard of their good service in Sierra Leone so when we saw them here in Gbarnga, we were very happy,” said Felicia Kekula, a mother of three who returned from a refugee camp in the neighbouring country. “They have been very helpful to us, giving us free medical treatment when we're in need.”

Togba Mulbah, an ex-combatant who went through a computer training course run by the Bangladeshi, also feels grateful to the Bangladeshi peacekeepers for their efforts to help Liberians. “The knowledge they have imparted to me will go a long way in reshaping my life from a former combatant to a productive citizen,” he said. “I now have basic skills which I will improve on in order to pursue a more fulfilling life.”

Bangladesh today is the largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping operations around the world. For the more than 8,000 Bangladeshi peacekeepers currently serving in 11 missions, winning the hearts and minds of the people they serve is a major motto. ♦

Bangladeshi soldiers go beyond their call of duty



LIBERIANS

How Should UNMIL Support



Janet N. Burnette
UNMIL Security

"I want UNMIL to remain here for some time in order to continue providing security to the government and its people. I'll also like UNMIL to support the girls' education programme that was recently launched."



Jeraline Newton
Student, University of Liberia

"Beef up the security around the country. There are a lot of idle ex-combatants around who have now become criminals, so UNMIL could support the Liberia National Police to beef up security. Another important area is the renovation and rehabilitation of some government schools in remote villages and towns through their Quick Impact Projects. This would enable rural children of school going age to at least get basic primary education."



Martin Pennie
Student, University of Liberia

"I'll first like to extend my thanks and appreciation to all the countries that are contributing to the peace process in Liberia. I'll like UNMIL to take the lead in providing security in Liberia for the next few years."



Decontee Benson
Student, University of Liberia

"Since the government is still in its infancy, UNMIL should primarily support with upgrading the road network throughout the country using their Engineering Battalions. Also, they can assist by providing vocational and other educational opportunities for ex-combatants which could reduce crime."



Obediah Freeman
Security, Stella Morris Polytechnic

"I would like UNMIL to support the government in the area of reconditioning the roads and bridges especially in rural Liberia."



Faith Trinity
Student, University of Liberia

"There are serious leakages on the roofs of UL buildings. I'll like UNMIL to help renovate those buildings since the rainy season has begun and we are always seriously affected whenever it rains."



Musu Samuels
Student, University of Liberia

"I want UNMIL to assist UL with reference materials. Using the Internet to do research is expensive and there are not too many students who are conversant and have access to the Internet. Let UNMIL help us with books; it would be a step in the right direction."



Patrick Usar
Architect/Teacher

"UNMIL should help in cleaning up the city. When driving along the road, we see a lot of shacks and huge piles of refuse along the streets. I'll therefore appreciate if UNMIL could help in that regard."



Arkie Doegmah
Student, Stella Morris Polytechnic

"I want UNMIL to restructure our security apparatus and make it more professional. I would also like UNMIL to support the government in rehabilitating the roads, especially around the city and its environs beginning with the Somalia Drive that stretches from the Freeport to Paynesville Red Light."

SPEAK

Liberia's New Government?



Samuel R. Outland
Student, University of Liberia

"I'll like UNMIL to assist the government in its fight against corruption because once the people in government remain corrupt; the international community would be hesitant to assist."



Benedict Sannoh
Student, University of Liberia

"As a student, I'll like UNMIL to help with the educational aspect of development by building more schools and to assist the government run the universities. I am convinced this will uplift the educational standard in Liberia. We are in the 21st century; but in reality, Liberia's educational system is still in the 18th century. Liberia has an illiterate population of about 85%. Unlike other countries that have had wars, the infrastructural destruction done here was largely due to illiteracy."



Dekontee Harmon
Student, University of Liberia

"I would like UNMIL to assist improve the educational system of the country. Liberia has an illiteracy rate of about 85 percent, which is alarming; as such the government needs support to improve the educational system."



Peter E. Gbor
Student, University of Liberia

"I want UNMIL to continue supporting the government in maintaining security. Secondly, I would like to appeal to UNMIL to assist the University of Liberia with reference books and materials to enhance our studies. Here at the university, there are no reference materials to do research. Most times we have to visit other university campus libraries to do research."



Josephine Carssure
Trader

"I want UNMIL to help with the rehabilitation of our roads and schools throughout the country."



Moses M. Zangar, Jr.
Journalist, UNMIL

"UNMIL is already doing well to help the government in terms of the security protection it provides for Liberians and foreigners alike throughout the country. Besides its mandate, I think academics in UNMIL need to voluntarily provide teaching support to the government-run University of Liberia by increasing the number of professors there."



Erica Kaba
Student, University of Liberia

"I would like UNMIL to help construct more schools throughout the country and to at least furnish them with some basic learning materials. UNMIL could further help the government by subsidizing these schools and making them free of charge for the primary level."



Dwelling Thony
Student, University of Liberia

"Assist with the procurement of chairs for the university will be a worthwhile gesture. Currently, the seating capacity on campus is a nightmare."



Emmanuel Tarpeh
Student, University of Liberia

"We really appreciate UNMIL. I would like them to open more vocational and skills training institutions to accommodate those who are not fortunate to attend academic institutions. There are a lot of unoccupied persons including ex-combatants who do not have basic skills to earn a livelihood; as such, they engage themselves in indecent acts, including criminal activities."

